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TRADE UNIONS

ALLAN FLANDERS, M.A.

*Senior Lecturer in Industrial Relations in the
University of Oxford*

FOURTH EDITION



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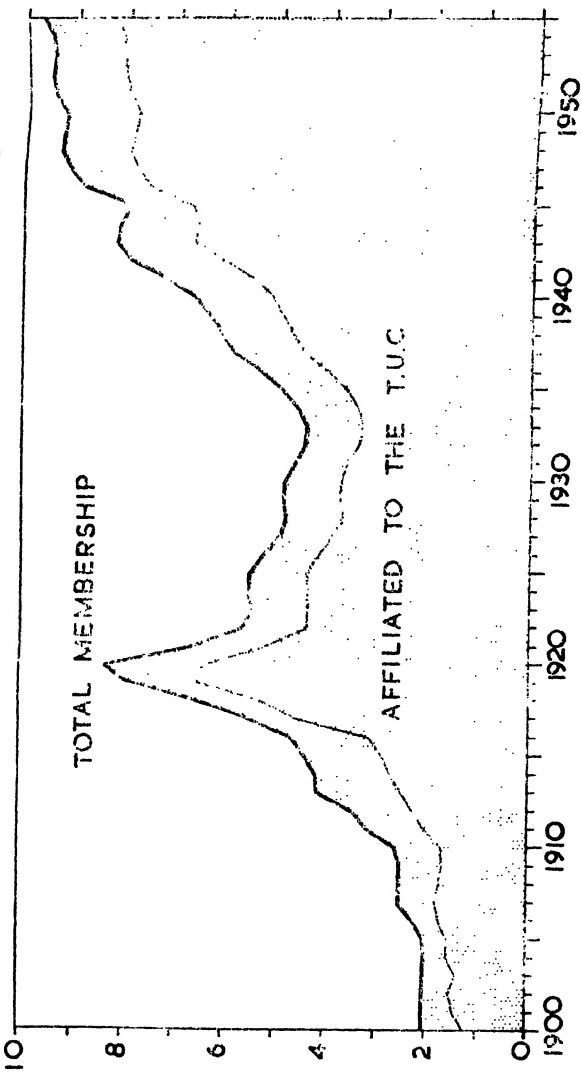
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GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS 1900 - 1955

MILLIONS



CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Beginnings of Organization

The origins of trade union organization in this country have been adequately described in the opening chapter of the Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920*. Subsequent research has not modified their main conclusions. There is no evidence, as they pointed out, to support the view that trade unions grew out of the mediaeval Craft Guilds. These bodies, which survive today in the City Companies of London, were dominated by the master craftsmen, and there are no examples of independent journeymen's societies branching off from them. The rise of combinations of workmen in particular trades is to be traced not to any "particular institution" but to "every opportunity for meeting together of wage-earners of the same occupation". In the words of the Webbs:

"... there is actual evidence of the rise of one of the oldest of the existing trade unions out of a gathering of the journeymen 'to take a social pint of porter together'. More often it is a tumultuous strike, out of which grows a permanent organization. Elsewhere, as we shall see, the workers meet to petition the House of Commons, and reassemble from time to time to carry on their agitation for the enactment of some new regulation, or the enforcement of an existing law. In other instances we shall find the journeymen of a particular trade frequenting certain public houses, at which they hear of situations vacant, and the 'house of call' becomes thus the nucleus of an organization."¹

The first form of permanent organization among wage-earners was the local trade club of the eighteenth century. Such clubs were to be found among skilled artisans in many trades, among hatters, cordwainers, curriers, brush-makers, basket-makers, calico-printers, cotton-spinners, coopers, sail-

¹1920 edition, p. 23.

makers, smiths, coachmakers, bricklayers, carpenters, silk-weavers, cutlery workers, printers. The trade clubs sought with little success, mainly by appeals to Parliament, to protect the wage standards of their members, based on custom and apprenticeship, against the growing devastating effects of unlimited competition. They were not only local and isolated from each other, but virtually illegal. A long series of Acts of Parliament had made it a criminal offence for workmen in particular trades to combine in order to change their wages and conditions. The doctrine of the Middle Ages still prevailed that it was the prerogative of the State to regulate such matters, although the State no longer attempted to do so.

With the Industrial Revolution towards the close of the century came the use of power machinery and the factory system. Politically it led to the complete triumph of the new doctrine of *laissez-faire*. For many this meant conditions of economic and social anarchy. Workers forced off the land crowded into towns, which in the main became dirty and melancholy assemblages of factories and hovels; the population grew with an incredible rapidity; productivity soared; great fortunes were made by some; but the vast majority of the working people became practically slaves of the new machines. The first reaction of the organized craftsmen was to redouble their appeals to Parliament for protection, but they appealed in vain. For:

“... the governing classes, who had found in the new industrial policy a source of enormous pecuniary profit, eagerly seized on the new economic theory as an intellectual and moral justification of that policy. The abandonment of the operatives by the law, previously resorted to under pressure of circumstances, and ... not without some remorse, was now carried out on principle, with unflinching determination.”¹

With the example of the French Revolution close at hand, the rich showed their fear and contempt of the new proletariat by passing the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, legislation which heralded a period of savage repression of trade union activity. Francis Place tells how:

¹Ibid, p. 55.

"... the suffering of persons employed in the cotton manufacture were beyond credibility; they were drawn into combinations, betrayed, prosecuted, convicted, sentenced, and monstrously severe punishments inflicted on them; they were reduced to and kept in the most wretched state of existence. . . . Justice was entirely out of the question; the working men could seldom obtain a hearing before a magistrate—never without impatience and insult; and never could they calculate on even an approximation to a rational conclusion."¹

Nineteen printers employed on *The Times* newspaper were condemned in 1810 to terms of imprisonment varying from nine months to two years for "combining and conspiring together maliciously to injure their masters and employers by quitting their work on account of their demands for an increase in wages not being acceded to".

It was in these conditions that trade unionism took root. The Combination Laws were not systematically enforced. Organization among craftsmen persisted often in the form of secret clubs, with fearful oaths and romantic rites. Despite their lack of organization the Lancashire cotton and wool workers, the miners of Northumberland and Durham, and the Scottish weavers, were all involved in large-scale strikes. The workers were learning that they must rely upon their own strength to improve their lot. But their separate efforts were unrelated and the absence of communication prevented them even from knowing accurately what was happening to their fellow-workers elsewhere.

Struggle for Existence

The first break in the policy of repression was a strange affair—an example of how imperceptibly history can sometimes be made. In 1824 Francis Place, a tailor of Charing Cross, and Joseph Hume, a radical M.P., managed to steer a Bill to repeal the Combination Acts through Parliament without the Government fully realizing what was contemplated; it became law without either a debate or a division. Its sponsors maintained that trades unions, as distinct from local trade clubs, were a reaction to repression, so that, if freedom to combine were

¹Quoted by C. M. Lloyd: *Trade Unionism*, 1928, p. 4.

granted, the new movement would soon disappear. The reverse proved to be true. Encouraged by the repeal, and an improvement in trade, new unions were formed and strikes broke out in many parts of the country. Thoroughly alarmed, the Government tried to replace the 1824 Act by a measure more drastic than the Combination Acts. The final result was a compromise. The new Act passed in 1825 did make it possible for the workers to organize without committing an illegal act, but there was hardly anything which the unions could do to carry out the purpose of their existence without coming into conflict with the law. Nevertheless, new organizations continued to spring up, and unions of engineers, shipwrights, miners, carpenters and joiners were formed at this time.

These early trade unions had all the grand ambitions of youth. For the first time the conception of a nation-wide common purpose gained ground among working people. Efforts were made to form national unions in place of the small local bodies and to set up federations. There had been in 1818 an attempt to establish a general union for the workers in all trades known as "The Philanthropic Hercules". This organization perished soon after it was born, but it was followed by similar projects. Some trade unions also directed their attention to more radical methods of improving the lot of their members than the seemingly hopeless process of bargaining with the employers; they aspired to change the economic structure of society, and, under the influence of Robert Owen, looked particularly towards the advantages of co-operative production.

In 1834 all these new ideas and endeavours culminated in the founding of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, with Owen as its leader. The Grand National had a phenomenal growth and recruited half a million members within a few weeks. The employers in the building trades retaliated by insisting on their employees signing "the document", an undertaking to leave or not to join a trade union. The legal vulnerability of the unions now became apparent in a series of prosecutions of trade unionists, which resulted in convictions and heavy sentences. The most notable of these was the case of the Dorchester labourers. For wholly peaceful attempts to build up a union for agricultural workers at

Tolpuddle six workers were arrested and sentenced to seven years' transportation. The great outburst of indignation to which this vicious punishment gave rise resulted in five of these workers being brought back from Botany Bay. The Grand National, however, after a series of abortive strikes, declined as rapidly as it had grown. After this collapse of their hopes, the radically minded workers—though not the trade unions as such—concerned themselves with the Chartist Movement and joined in its agitation for an extension of political rights, as a prerequisite to their industrial emancipation.

These short-lived and vaguely revolutionary developments had taken place against a temporary background of economic depression. There now began a long period of industrial expansion, which gave the trade unions an opportunity to consolidate themselves on a sounder financial basis. In 1851 a number of unions catering for skilled workers in the metal trades formed the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. This national union was subsequently known as the New Model, since its form of organization served as a pattern for other trades. According to the Webbs it had a permanent paying membership of 11,000 and a regular income of £500 a week. Such financial stability was without precedent, and the new association was the most powerful trade union in the country. The New Model was also distinguished by a centralized and businesslike administration. Subscriptions were high by any previous standards, but in return provision was made for various friendly benefits. Needless to say, it spread only among the craftsmen and skilled workers, who could afford such payments and who came to be looked upon as the "aristocracy of labour."

Centralization of control within the new unions also made possible greater co-ordination among them. A clique of five powerful leaders, named by the Webbs "The Junta", exercised for a time almost undisputed sway in the trade union world. They were extreme only in their caution and moderation. Nevertheless the movement was not static: closer unity was growing up from below as well as being imposed from above. The strike of the London builders in 1859-60 over a claim that their hours should be reduced to nine per day brought

behind them the support of many other trade unions and led to the formation of the London Trades Council. In Glasgow, Sheffield, Liverpool and Edinburgh similar bodies had already been created as voluntary local federations of union branches. In 1868 the Manchester and Salford Trades Council called a national Trades Union Congress of trades councils and trade unions. Fewer than 120,000 members were represented, but in six years this number was multiplied tenfold. It is this congress which has continued to meet annually (apart from the years 1870 and 1914) until today.

The growing power and solidarity of the small trade union movement roused alarm among the governing classes. In 1867 a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the organization and rules of the unions and to inquire into allegations of intimidation and outrage, which they were accused of encouraging. "The Junta" now made their outstanding contribution to the cause of trade unionism; they went into action in defence of union rights and secured the assistance of a gifted team of writers and lawyers. The results were historic. Even the majority report of the Royal Commission made recommendations which fell far short of what the employers had been demanding, while the minority report, which was in effect acted upon, proposed giving the trade unions legal protection while leaving them in all important respects voluntary organizations.

Between 1871 and 1876 a number of Acts were passed, which defined the legal status and powers of unions in a way which today remains substantially unaltered. The Trade Union Act, 1871—amended in some particulars in 1876—declared that a trade union¹ was no longer to be considered unlawful because its objects were in restraint of trade. It

¹The definition of a trade union contained in this Act was altered by the Acts of 1876 and 1913. Taking the subsequent amendments into account it is "any combination, whether temporary or permanent, the principal objects of which are under its constitution, the regulation of the relations between workmen and masters or between workmen and workmen or between masters and masters, or the imposing of restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and also the provisions of benefits to members." (See N. A. Citrine: *Trade Union Law*, Stevens 1950, p. 296 ff., also for an interpretation of its meaning). It thus includes employers' associations as well as trade unions in the common use of the term.

enabled trade unions to protect their funds against defaulting officials, but otherwise accorded them a large measure of freedom from legal proceedings in the conduct of their internal affairs. It further instituted a system of voluntary registration of trade unions, by which they could acquire a certain civil status, providing they fulfilled definite obligations, such as setting out their objects in their rules and rendering an annual return of properly audited accounts.

The Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875 (which repealed the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1871) was intended to establish the legality of collective bargaining. It declared that if two or more people agreed to do something "in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute" it was not indictable as a criminal conspiracy unless the same act committed by one person only would have been criminal. It also legalized peaceful picketing, though penalties were provided for violence, intimidation and other aggressive acts. In short, it seemed that the trade unions had secured the mixture of freedom of action and legal protection they wanted. They had been recognized, if rather grudgingly, as an essential social institution.

New Unionism and Political Representation

That trade unionism was now established on firm social as well as legal foundations, was soon demonstrated by its weathering of the severe trade slump which followed swiftly upon its political success. Membership declined—it was more than halved—but only for a time, and all the larger unions emerged without their resources being seriously impaired. But if the foundations of the trade unions were firm, they were also still extremely narrow, and equally narrow was the prevailing conception of their tasks. The next main phase in their history is concerned with a great widening process in both respects, the discovery by the movement of its latent possibilities.

In this period there were two main developments within the trade union world—New Unionism and Political Representation—which were closely interwoven, and a third largely outside it on which the other two depended. This third development was the revival of socialist ideas. The Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society were founded

in the early 'eighties and the Independent Labour Party in 1893. Although their political views differed considerably, they were all agreed on two things: that the *whole* of the working class should be organized; and that it should as an *independent* factor play a decisive part in industry and politics.

New Unionism was the name given to this extension of union organization. The workers who were now being organized had not the same possibilities of improving their conditions by exercising some control over the supply of their labour in the manner of the skilled workers. Nor did their wages allow them to pay the high contributions required for the payment of friendly society benefits. They had perforce to resort to strike action and political agitation to gain their ends and were attracted more strongly than the highly paid craftsmen by the socialist conception of an egalitarian society.

Moreover the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 had given the vote to the main body of workers. In 1874 the Labour Representation League had secured the return of the first two working-class candidates—both miners—to Parliament. The two established political parties were now competing for union support by the passing of social legislation. The idea of building up an independent political representation of labour interests began to appear practical.

Just as the formation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had proved to be the turning point in the previous period, so did the successful strike of London dockers in 1889 become a signal and a portent for this phase of union development. With the victory of the dockers and the successful organization of the gas-workers, there was a burst of enthusiasm for bringing trade unionism into all those occupations as yet untouched by it.

Although the growth of unionism among the previously unorganized workers reacted favourably upon the membership of older unions, there was a continual tussle between the old conservative and the new radical forces within the movement. The first victory of the latter was won at the Trades Union Congress in 1890, which committed itself to a programme that included the traditional revolutionary demand for an eight-hour day and a number of near-socialist resolutions.

The former retaliated in 1895, when they commanded a sufficient majority at Congress to exclude the trades councils—who were more closely associated with the new trends—from affiliation, ostensibly because this involved a dual representation of the workers. By the end of the century, however, this marked divergence of outlook had largely disappeared. In 1900 an alliance between a number, but not all, of the trade unions and the various socialist political societies produced the Labour Representation Committee, which in 1906 changed its name and became the Labour Party.

Expansion, confidence, militancy and success were now—and for two decades—among the main attributes of British trade unionism. Membership grew from roughly 2,000,000 at the turn of the century to 4,000,000 by the outbreak of war in 1914. There were several national strikes, notably among the miners, railwaymen and transport workers. In these conflicts the workers did not achieve all their immediate objects but there was a steady improvement in the arrangements for collective bargaining.

Meanwhile the political labour movement was growing and forcing the pace of social reform, which included measures giving state support to the industrial activities of the unions. Workmen's compensation was substantially improved in 1906, a new Education Act was introduced in 1907, followed by Old Age Pensions and the Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Act in 1908. Trade Boards for fixing legal minimum wages in the "sweated" trades appeared in 1909, and during the same year the Fair Wages Clause in government contracts was remodelled to secure a greater respect for union agreements. The National Insurance Act of 1911, apart from inaugurating health and unemployment insurance, gave a fillip to union membership by recognizing trade unions as Approved Societies.

The value of the new Labour Party to the trade unions was more especially demonstrated by the assistance it was able to give them in countering two major attacks upon their freedom which came this time from the Law Courts. In 1901 a judgment was given by the House of Lords in the case *Taff Vale Railway Co v. Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*, which threatened completely to undermine the

position which it was thought had been gained by the 1871-6 legislation. The company had sued the union for damages in consequence of loss inflicted upon them by the strike, and the verdict was given in their favour. This decision seemed likely to reduce the trade unions to impotence, since if they declared a strike they ran the risk of their funds being attacked at law. The Trades Disputes Act of 1906 removed this liability and recognized inducement to breach of contract and peaceful picketing as legitimate adjuncts to the methods of collective bargaining.

Partly perhaps in consequence of this Parliamentary success the political activities of the unions were next threatened by the Osborne Judgment in 1909, in which the House of Lords held that it was illegal for a trade union to spend its funds on other purposes than the industrial objects specified in previous Acts. This interpretation of the law threatened to cripple the new Labour Party, which relied greatly on the unions for financial support, but a sustained agitation brought about the Trade Union Act of 1913. The Act laid down the conditions under which political objects could be included in the rules of a union with its members' consent.

Syndicalism and the Impact of War

The main effect which the First World War had on British trade unionism was to enhance its strength and social standing. The co-operation of the trade unions was indispensable for military and industrial mobilization, and wartime full employment greatly improved their bargaining position. The unions voluntarily declared an industrial truce on the outbreak of hostilities. Most of them reluctantly agreed to a suspension of those workshop practices which might lead to a limiting of production, though on the understanding that they would be restored at the end of the war. At the same time a form of compulsory arbitration was agreed upon for the ultimate settlement of all trade disputes in the munition industries in exchange for a Government promise to limit employers' profits.

This policy of close co-operation with the Government for the prosecution of the war was not accepted so readily by some of the more radically minded trade unionists at the

lower levels of organization. Their dissatisfaction increased when it became apparent that profiteering was rife, that the cost of living was rising rapidly and wages were not increasing proportionately. The South Wales miners went on strike in the summer of 1915 and proved by their example that a system of compulsory arbitration could not be maintained only by legislation.

There were many more unofficial stoppages of work organized by "Workers' Committees", "Shop Stewards' Committees", "Vigilance Committees" and similar bodies which sprang up in many localities, especially in the munition industries. These local organizations formed themselves into a National Workers' Committee Movement, which became an alternative, unofficial leadership in the trade union world. Dissatisfaction with wartime conditions and a definite anti-war spirit contributed much to the dynamic of the movement, but it also gave expression to a purpose which had been steadily gaining ground in the pre-war years. This purpose was summed up by the popular syndicalist slogan "Workers' Control".

The dichotomy of attitude which had developed during the war between the official and unofficial leaderships largely disappeared at the end of hostilities. The engineers incorporated the shop steward system into their trade union organization. The claim of the workers to have a voice in the way their industries were conducted had been partially acknowledged in the Whitley Reports. A considerable extension of statutory wage regulation promised better conditions to the workers in badly paid and poorly organized industries. At the same time there had been an immense growth in trade union membership, especially in the numbers affiliated to the Trades Union Congress which had risen from 2,250,000 in 1913 to 6,500,000 in 1920.

Thus it was in a mood of supreme optimism, with a strong belief in the power of the labour movement to change the social order, that the trade unions met the great post-war depression which engulfed Great Britain at the end of 1920. They suffered a rude awakening. From then on the hopes of the workers were dealt a series of crushing blows which culminated in the failure of the General Strike in 1926.

Industrial strife on a national scale began with the railway strike in 1919, which for nine days paralysed the whole of the railway systems in the country. This ended with a victory for the unions and was notable for the publicity campaigns carried on by both sides to gain public support—the Government was, at the time, still in control of the railways and therefore in the position of employer. In 1922 the engineering industry was idle as the result of a national lock-out, but the economic tide had turned and the employers were successful, at least for the time being, in maintaining their claim that the trade unions should not interfere in “managerial functions”. But though unrest and conflict were widespread, it was the miners who were the hardest hit and who occupied the centre of the stage in this stormy era.

The miners’ first battle in 1921 against wage reductions and a return to district wage agreements led to the collapse of the Triple Alliance of the trade unions of the railwaymen, transport workers and miners for mutual support in industrial action. It was looked upon generally as a great pillar of strength for the whole of the movement and, by the syndicalists, as the main weapon with which to capture power for the workers. The Triple Alliance issued notices for a strike of all their members in support of the miners, but for a variety of reasons these notices were postponed and finally withdrawn on April 14th—a date known afterwards as “Black Friday”. The miners continued their strike on their own, but in the end suffered defeat.

“Black Friday” foreshadowed an even blacker event for the trade union movement. Four years later the strike called by the Trades Union Congress also in support of the miners and involving 1,500,000 workers ended in failure. The history of this nine-day General Strike, the most momentous event in the development of British trade unionism, is too intricate a subject to deal with fully here. It must suffice to say that it demonstrated two things: the strength of the feeling of solidarity among the organized workers; and the futility of the syndicalist reliance upon “direct action”. The Government retaliated by passing the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 (since repealed by the Labour Government in 1946), which made a sympathetic strike or a lock-out designed or calculated

to coerce the Government illegal, severed the connection between the Civil Service organizations and other trade unions, and imposed new restrictions on the unions' political activities and their conduct of trade disputes.

From Conflict to Co-operation

Their failure to resist wage reductions and to stop the wave of victimization which followed the General Strike weakened the trade unions more than the drain on their resources, which prolonged industrial conflict had imposed. They now settled down in a spirit of sober realism to build as best they could upon the solid foundations they had laid in other ways. The employers, at least the more enlightened among them, had also learned their lesson. The constant trials of strength between themselves and their workpeople were undeniably very bad business and were losing them their markets in the world. "Peace in Industry" was the new slogan readily accepted by the Government and by most of the leaders on both sides of industry.

In 1928 a series of conferences was initiated between the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and a group of leading employers. These conferences, usually known as the Mond-Turner conversations, ranged over a large number of subjects of joint concern, but their immediate outcome was indecisive. Although joint reports were produced, neither of the two main employers' organizations, the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations and the Federation of British Industries, considered themselves bound by the recommendations. The importance of the conferences lay more in the new co-operative approach to industrial relations to which they gave expression.

The development of a common economic policy on the part of the trade union movement had been made possible by its greater integration after the First World War. A number of important amalgamations had taken place and loose federations had been replaced by more compact bodies. Many of the large unions of today were formed at this time, including the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Union of General

and Municipal Workers, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers and the Union of Post Office Workers. Furthermore the reorganization of the Trades Union Congress in the early 'twenties had given it a new authority. Its General Council was able to speak in the name of the trade union movement as a whole and was now equipped with a proper administrative staff, headed from 1926 onwards, by an energetic and enterprising General Secretary, Walter Citrine, determined to make the T.U.C. a power in the land.

But labour's disappointments were not at an end. With the failure of industrial action the pendulum had swung to greater reliance upon political action. The return of the second Labour Government towards the end of 1929, even though it depended for a majority upon Liberal support, was at first regarded as a great triumph. The Labour vote had risen to 8,400,000 as compared with 2,200,000 in 1918. Unfortunately this electoral triumph coincided with the outbreak of the World Depression. The unemployment figures mounted month by month without the Government producing any policy to deal with the crisis. The reckoning came in 1931 and with it the default of some of the leaders of the Labour Party, MacDonald, Snowden, Thomas and others. In the General Election which led to the formation of the "National" Government, the Labour vote dropped to 6,600,000 and its representation in the House of Commons from 289 to 46 M.P.s. The whole of the organized labour was bewildered and cast down as never before.

The electoral defeat had a salutary influence on the labour movement, however. In the first place it brought its political and industrial wings into closer relationship, since one of the obvious failures in MacDonald's leadership had been his unwillingness to consult with the trade unions, or at least to give much weight to their views. Furthermore, it underlined the need for working out a constructive policy in place of the somewhat empty propaganda slogans of the past. The Labour Party had to know exactly what it would do, and the Trades Union Congress what it wanted a Labour Government to do when one was formed again. This need was met in various ways. The Fabian Society which had fallen into a condition

of senile decay was revived with the aid of a New Fabian Research Bureau and contributed much to the formulation of practical policies. The Trades Union Congress in a series of policy statements, of which the two most important were the *Report on the Public Control and Regulation of Industry and Trade* in 1932 and the *Report on Post-War Reconstruction* in 1944, gave the necessary leadership to the trade union movement.

During the inter-war years trade union membership reached its lowest point in 1933-4. From then on it increased year by year with the recovery of trade and rising money wages. The radically changed conception of trade unionism as a willing and essential partner in the conduct of the nation's economic affairs steadily gained acceptance both within the movement and in society at large. But it was not until the outbreak of war that the trade unions secured the position for which they were striving.

In some respects, the Second World War had similar effects to the first, but there were two important differences. This time the trade unions were fully united at all levels in their attitude to the war. The day after this country declared war on Nazi Germany the annual Trades Union Congress opened at Bridlington. Of the 659 accredited delegates only 490 were able to attend, but of these only two dissented from the resolution pledging full support to the war effort. Consequently there was no appreciable political opposition in the trade union world to wholehearted co-operation with the Government (although the Communists tried to stir it up in the period prior to Russia's entry into the war). Of equal significance was the sensible way in which the wartime economy was controlled so as to avoid profiteering and other of the troubles which showed themselves from 1914 to 1918. Thus the trade unions were able to give reasonable protection to their members and even to improve their conditions without industrial conflict breaking out on any serious scale.

CHAPTER II

DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATION

Complex Structure

The way in which the British trade union movement has evolved makes a description of its present-day structure a difficult task. As we have seen, union organization has not been planned by some central authority, by the State, by a political party or even by a federation of the unions' own creating. Nor has theory played much part in its design. The growth of the trade unions has largely been "a spontaneous, healthy process arising out of the needs of the common people".¹ The result of this organic mode of development is not a neat, tidy pattern, but, as might be expected, a rather bewildering complex of overlapping and interlocking bodies of all shapes and sizes.

Size is something which can be measured, and the extent of the diversity of British trade union organization is already apparent when the unions are classified according to this one criterion. At the end of 1955 there were within the United Kingdom 666 separate trade unions with an aggregate membership of 9,662,000.² These were all organizations—of salaried and professional workers as well as manual wage-earners—known to include among their functions that of negotiating with employers for the purpose of regulating the conditions of employment of their members. Grouped according to their size, the following decidedly uneven picture emerges.

¹W. Milne-Bailey: *Trade Union Documents*, 1929, p. 1.

²*Ministry of Labour Gazette*, November 1956. This total includes 51,000 members belonging to union branches in the Irish Republic and 104,000 to other branches outside the U.K. The total membership *resident* within the U.K., apart from those members who were serving in the Forces, was 9,507,000.

Size of Trade Unions, 1955

Size	Number of Unions	Percentage of total membership
Under 1,000	368	1.1
1,000 — 25,000	248	13.3
25,000 — 100,000	33	18.4
100,000 and over	17	67.2
Totals	666	100

It will be noted that while the seventeen largest unions represent two-thirds of the general body of trade unionists, at the other end of the scale 368 small unions retain their separate identity though they account for little more than one per cent of the total membership.

Fortunately there is one simplifying factor in this complex structure: the existence of a central body, the Trades Union Congress, which can fairly claim to speak in the name of the trade union movement. It is true that only 186 unions were affiliated to the T.U.C. at the end of 1955, but their aggregate membership was 8,264,000.¹ Only two large unions with more than 100,000 members—the National Association of Local Government Officers and the National Union of Teachers—remain unaffiliated although they both have a friendly relationship with the T.U.C. Most of the other unaffiliated unions of any size, including several teachers' unions, organize employees in national or local government service.

The absence of any kind of uniformity is just as evident when we attempt to classify the unions affiliated to the T.U.C., according to the categories of workers whom they organize.

¹The Ministry of Labour's statistics previously quoted are not strictly comparable with those provided by the T.U.C. Both sets of figures count workers who are members of more than one union twice over, but this duplication is relatively insignificant. The Ministry's total, however, also includes trade unionists in the Forces or in union branches overseas, for whom unions do not normally pay affiliation fees to the T.U.C. Some of the trade unions affiliated to the T.U.C. are in fact federations made up of unions counted separately in the Ministry's figures.

Every conceivable type of organization exists and no one type can be said to predominate. It is customary to distinguish between three main structural forms of union organization: occupational (or craft) unions; industrial (or common employment) unions; and general labour unions. The first group includes those unions which seek to organize all employees in a single or several related occupations, regardless of the industry in which at the time they are employed; the second those which admit to membership all employees in a particular industry or service whatever their occupation; and the third those which open their doors to all workers without distinction as to occupation or industry. This theoretical differentiation has been applied as far as it is possible to the list of unions affiliated to the T.U.C. given below, but it is too arbitrary to provide more than an over-simplified picture.

Trade Unions Affiliated to the T.U.C. in 1955

Employment Groups	Membership (in 1,000s)
MINING AND QUARRYING:	
(I) National Union of Mineworkers†	675
(c) National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers	35
Two other unions	9
RAILWAYS:	
(I) National Union of Railwaymen	368
(c) Transport Salaried Staffs Association	88
(c) Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen†	73
ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING	
(IC) Amalgamated Engineering Union	854
(IC) Electrical Trades Union	224
(c) United Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders' Society†	88
(I) Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers	76
(c) National Union of Vehicle Builders	60
(c) Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen	59
(*) National Society of Metal Mechanics†	38
(c) National Union of Enginemen, Firemen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers†	37
Twenty-four other unions	132

IRON AND STEEL AND MINOR METALS:

(I) Iron and Steel Trades Confederation	109
(c) National Union of Sheetmetal Workers and Braziers†	42
Fifteen other unions	55

BUILDING, WOODWORKING AND FURNISHING:

(c) Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers	197
(c) Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers†	94
(c) National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives	74
(I) National Society of Painters	69
(c) Plumbing Trades Union	56
(c) Amalgamated Society of Wood-Cutting Machinists	30
Thirteen other unions	69

PRINTING AND PAPER:

(I) National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers	150
(c) Typographical Association†	51
(I) National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants	42
Ten other unions	74

TEXTILES:

(c) Amalgamated Weavers' Association*	76
(I) National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers	72
(c) National Association of Card, Blowing and Ring Room Operatives*	50
Twenty-five other unions	65

CLOTHING, LEATHER AND BOOT AND SHOE:

(I) National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers*	125
(I) National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives	81
(I) National Union of Hosiery Workers*	40
Nine other unions	40

DISTRIBUTION AND OTHER INDUSTRIES:

(G) Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers	347
(I) Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers	27
(I) National Society of Pottery Workers*	25
Twelve other unions	72

AGRICULTURE:

(I) National Union of Agricultural Workers .	135
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OTHER TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS:

(G) Transport and General Workers' Union .	1,278
(G) National Union of General and Municipal Workers	805
(I) National Union of Seamen	62
Eleven other unions	61

CIVIL SERVICE:

(I) Union of Post Office Workers	160
(C) Civil Service Clerical Association*	147
(C) Post Office Engineering Union	67
(C) Inland Revenue Staff Federation	36
Four other unions	54

OTHER PUBLIC EMPLOYEES:

(I) National Union of Public Employees	175
(I) Confederation of Health Service Employees .	51
Two other unions	24

OTHER NON-MANUAL WORKERS:

(C) Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union	53
(I) National Union of Bank Employees	47
(I) National Federation of Insurance Workers .	36
(C) Musicians' Union	28
(I) National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees*	25
Ten other unions	71

Notes: Unions with no women members †

Unions with more women members than men *

Rough Classification: (I)=industrial

(C)=craft or occupational

(G)=general

(*)=subsidiary of Transport and General
Workers' Union

The above grouping does not correspond exactly with that adopted by the Trades Union Congress. Membership is for the end of 1955, as given in the *Trades Union Congress Report*, 1956.

Craft Unions

The historical approach is more helpful if we wish to understand both the variety in the types of organization and the reasons for their existence. Craft unionism was the first stable

form of organization to emerge. Apart from the material advantages which the craft unions were able to bestow upon their members, as a result of their bargaining strength and system of friendly benefits, the loyalties and traditions which they established provided an additional bond. When at the end of the last century new theories of trade union organization began to gain acceptance, these unions naturally showed no inclination to allow themselves to be carved up in response to theoretical arguments. Many, but by no means all, of them had been transformed from local into national unions by amalgamation, and it was this process which continued, leading subsequently to the formation of large, multi-craft unions, some of which have also admitted less skilled workers employed in close connection with their trades.

This can be taken as one main line of structural growth, but it should be realized that contemporary British trade unionism reflects all of its stages. The jurisdiction of the London Typographical Society (formerly the London Society of Compositors), is defined by a fifteen-mile radius around the London General Post Office; it represents but one example of a pure craft union, confining its membership to one locality. The United Patternmakers' Association caters for the workers in a single craft, but employed in various parts of the country. Typical multi-craft unions, few of which now limit their members to those who have served an apprenticeship, are the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers and the National Union of Vehicle Builders. Both the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Electrical Trades Union, although formed originally as multi-craft unions, now represent a half-way house between craft and industrial unionism. The A.E.U., for example, has accepted male machine-operators and labourers into a special class of membership since 1926, and women since 1943.

General Workers' Unions

The second line of structural growth has led to what is perhaps the most characteristic and significant feature of British trade union organization, the existence of two, large, general workers' unions, the Transport and General Workers'

Union and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, which together cast about a quarter of the total votes at the annual Trades Union Congress. It is somewhat misleading to describe either of these bodies as "general labour unions", if this description is taken to imply that they cater only for unskilled workers. The T.&G.W.U. organizes practically all categories of workers employed in overland transport—other than on the railways—and they represent about a third of its total membership. Its relationship to road transport is essentially that of an industrial union. On its general labour side, however, it extends into agriculture, quarrying, the manufacture of cement and bricks, power production, engineering and the metal trades, building, textiles, rubber, chemicals, food processing and several other industries. It also has a special section for clerical and supervisory workers. Most of these industries are also entered by the N.U.G.&M.W. but this union has about a third of its membership concentrated among the employees of local and other public authorities.

Both of these unions were formed by amalgamations in the early nineteen-twenties, but their full history must be traced back to the period of "New Unionism". The dockers' strike in 1889 firmly established the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union, as did the equally successful gasworkers' strike in the same year, the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union. The former body took the initiative in establishing a National Transport Workers' Federation in 1910 and again, under the spirited leadership of Mr. Ernest Bevin, in promoting the amalgamation discussions which resulted in the formation of the T.&G.W.U. in 1920. The subsequent enlarging of the scope of this union by its power to attract many other, mainly small unions into amalgamation is shown below; the most important of these amalgamations was the one which incorporated the Workers' Union in 1929 and greatly extended the general labour basis of the T.&G.W.U. Similarly the old gasworkers' union changed its name to the National Union of General Workers in 1918 and became the nucleus which attracted other general labour unions and then the main municipal workers' union to form the N.U.G.&M.W. in 1924.

*The Amalgamation History of the Transport
and General Workers' Union*

Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Barge- men	
Amalgamated Carters, Lorrymen and Motormen's Union	
Amalgamated Association of Carters and Motormen	
Associated Horsemen's Union	
Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union	
Labour Protection League	
National Amalgamated Labourers' Union	
National Union of Docks, Wharves and Shipping Staffs	
National Union of Ships' Clerks, Grain Weighers and Coal- meters	1922
National Union of Vehicle Workers	
National Amalgamated Coal Workers' Union	
National Union of Dock, Riverside and General Workers	
National Union of British Fishermen	
North of England 'Trimmers' and 'Teemers' Association	
North of Scotland Horse and Motormen's Association	
United Vehicle Workers	
Belfast Breadservers' Association	
Greenock Sugar Porters' Association	
Dundee Jute and Flax Stowers' Association	
North Wales Craftsmen and General Workers' Union	1923
North Wales Quarrymen's Union	
Scottish Union of Dock Labourers	
United Order of General Labourers	1924
Association of Coastwise Masters, Mates and Engineers	1925
Weaver Watermen's Association	
Irish Mental Hospital Workers' Union	
National Amalgamated Union of Enginemen, Fire- men, Motormen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers	1926
Cumberland Enginemen, Boilermen and Electrical Workers' Union	1928
Workers' Union	1929
Belfast Operative Bakers' Union	
Northern Ireland Textile Workers' Union	1930
London Co-operative Mutuality Club Collectors' Association	
National Union of Co-operative Insurance Society Em- ployees	1933
Portadown Textile Workers' Union	
Scottish Farm Servants' Union	

"Altogether" Builders' Labourers and Constructional Workers' Society	} 1934
Scottish 'Busmen's Union	
National Winding and General Engineers' Society	} 1935
Electricity Supply Staff Association (Dublin)	
Halifax and District Carters' and Motormen's Association	} 1936
Power Loom Tenters' Trade Union of Ireland	
Belfast Journeymen Butchers' Association	} 1937
Scottish Scafishers' Union	
Humber Amalgamated Steam Trawlers' Engineers and Firemen's Union	} 1938
Imperial War Graves Commission Staff Association	
Port of London Deal Porters' Union	} 1939
North of England Engineers' and Firemen's Amalgamation	
National Glass Workers' Trade Protection Association	} 1940
Radcliffe and District Enginemen and Boilermen's Provident Society	
National Glass Bottle Makers' Society	} 1942
Liverpool Pilots' Association	
Manchester Ship Canal Pilots' Association	} 1943
Grangemouth Pilots' Association	
Leith and Granton Pilots	} 1944
Dundee Pilots	
Methil Pilots	} 1945
Government Civil Employees' Association	
Liverpool and District Carters' and Motormen's Union	} 1946
Lurgan Hemmers', Veiners' and General Workers' Union	
United Cut Nail Makers of Great Britain Protection Society	} 1947
	} 1951

There was a time when the establishment of one great, consolidated general workers' union appeared to be a distinct possibility. A National Council of General Labourers was set up in 1908 and this in turn was strengthened into a National Federation of General Workers in 1917, but the scheme which this latter organization produced for complete amalgamation made no provision for the separate handling of the trade affairs of the different sections. It was sharply criticized on this account by the dockers and other transport workers and failed to materialize. In the past two decades, however, the T. & G.W.U. and N.U.G. & M.W. have had cordial working relations and a similar viewpoint on many policy questions.

Another union which might possibly be classified in the "general workers'" group is the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. U.S.D.A.W. was formed by the amalgamation of three distributive workers' unions in 1945, the largest of which was the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers which had found its main strength in the organization of co-operative employees. It is now the sixth largest union in the country with good prospects for further expansion. Although its own special field of recruitment remains the distributive trades, which are still poorly organized, it includes workers from a number of light industries.

Originally the exclusiveness of the craft unions led inevitably to the setting up of special unions for less skilled workers, based on a lower membership subscription and a different approach to the methods of improving the working conditions of their members. Outside the printing trades (where the two main unions catering for workers excluded from the craft unions have retained their separate identity and co-operated successfully with them in the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation) and those industries or services in which powerful industrial unions have been formed, there was a strong trend towards amalgamation on the part of general labour unions, since in their case the old maxim that unity is strength had particular application. Most of them were apt to have a high membership turnover so that they had to be broadly based if they were to maintain their influence. When the main amalgamations took place after the First World War, they produced efficient if somewhat bureaucratic organizations able to weather the economic storm of the post-war years.

One of the reasons for the growth and relative stability of the large general workers' unions has been the adaptability of their type of organization to changing patterns of employment.¹ As Professor Cole has pointed out:

"There has been a great expansion both of light consumers' industries and of clerical and distributive employment. . . . These expanding trades and industries call for only small complements

¹Other reasons are suggested by H. A. Clegg in *General Union*, 1954. See particularly Part V, "An Appraisal of the General Union".

of highly skilled workers. In the main, their demand is for quickness, general intelligence, and manual dexterity which can be fairly quickly acquired, and is fairly easily transferable from one industry or employment to another."¹

This "calls for a form of trade union organization based neither on craft nor on industry, but wide enough to cover an extensive range of trades." The fact that the general workers' unions acknowledged no *theoretical* limits to their domain enabled them freely to enter those fields of employment which most of the other unions were prepared or compelled to ignore.²

Industrial Unions

Once the evolution of the craft and general workers' unions is understood it is not difficult to appreciate the fate of the doctrine of industrial unionism in the British context. By the time it appeared on the scene as a conscious influence within the trade union world, substantial parts of the territory which industrial unions might be expected to occupy had already been possessed either by stubborn, craft-conscious unions or by the new amorphous general labour unions. The doctrine had its heyday roughly during the period covered by the first quarter of the present century, and was made the subject of passionate advocacy. So much so, that for a time its acceptance was taken almost as an implicit characteristic of the progressive, militant trade unionist. As in other parts of the world, it was closely associated with semi-syndicalist theories of the social millennium. Yet its practical influence has been disproportionate to the energy expended on its debate.

The strength and success of the agitation was great enough to secure the passing of a resolution at the 1924 Trades Union Congress which, after declaring in favour of reducing the number of trade unions to "an absolute minimum", suggested that "the aim should be as far as possible organization by industry". The T.U.C. General Council were asked to prepare a scheme for the reorganization of the trade union movement accordingly.

¹G. D. H. Cole: *Fabian Socialism*, 1943, pp. 156-7.

²They acknowledge certain *practical* limits, of course, and do not normally invade provinces already occupied by recognized unions affiliated to

When they presented their report three years later it appeared that the affiliated unions submitting evidence had very different views on the definition of an industry. Furthermore, it was evident that a body such as the T.U.C., composed as it was of all types of unions, was in no position to reach agreement on one particular form of trade union organization. "It was recognized," as the T.U.C. declared in a later report, "that the most which the General Council could achieve would be to remove the main causes of friction in the day-to-day working of the trade unions, and to facilitate negotiations for amalgamations and for various forms of closer unity."¹

Those British unions which today approximate in their structure to industrial organizations have in fact little in the way of common origins. The miners, who participated in the great trade union awakening of "New Unionism", united various of their district unions into the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1888. The Federation, which sought to organize every worker employed in or about a coal mine, did not succeed in incorporating the powerful Durham and Northumberland unions until 1908 and was not transformed into the National Union of Mineworkers until as late as 1945.

The National Union of Railwaymen, which today is one of the few industrial unions to press its claims to the point of creating bad relations with other unions competing with it for members, was formed in 1913 by the amalgamation of several of the manual workers' unions then existing. One of them, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen preferred to retain its separate identity, as did the Railway Clerks' Association, which was established in 1897 to organize all grades of salaried railway employees. In the railway workshops the N.U.R. organizes mainly the less skilled workers. Many of the craftsmen belong to one of the several engineering unions, so that in the unlikely event of the three railway unions agreeing to merge, an appreciable number of railway employees would still remain outside the jurisdiction of the new organization.

Three other strong industrial unions, the Union of Post

¹*Trade Union Structure and Closer Unity*—Final Report, 1947, pp. 6-7.

Office Workers, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operative and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, all have dissimilar origins. The Union of Post Office Workers was formed in 1920 from a number of associations organizing postmen telephonists and clerical workers under the leadership of enthusiastic guild socialists. A year later it wrote into its rules that its objective was: "The organization of Post Office Workers into a comprehensive industrial Union, with a view to the Service being ultimately conducted and managed as a National Guild." There are still several sectional organizations among Post Office employees, however, notably the Post Office Engineering Union, which jealously maintain their independence.

The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives was founded as far back as 1874. Apart from a small, but powerful, local union in Lancashire, it occupies the whole of the field of boot and shoe production. This might well be regarded as one of the most successful of industrial unions but it was not organized on any conscious principle of industrial unionism.

The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, which despite its name now acts as a single union, is the product of an ingenious scheme for avoiding legal difficulties when the law governing amalgamations was stricter than it is today.¹ In 1917 a number of unions concerned with the iron and steel trades agreed to establish two new bodies, the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the former, virtually a new union, affiliated to the latter together with the existing unions. From the date of the amalgamation, however, it was decided that all new members were to be recruited into B.I.S.A.K.T.A. to which the existing unions were also encouraged to transfer their membership. In this way B.I.S.A.K.T.A. eventually became the only trade union affiliated to the I.S.T.C. Today the two organizations are virtually identical, but the formal

¹Under the Trade Union (Amalgamation) Act, 1917, any two or more unions may amalgamate providing in each of the unions the votes of at least 50 per cent of the members entitled to vote are recorded and at least 60 per cent of those voting are in favour. Another method, which avoids the necessity of a ballot in each union, is provided under the Societies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1940. This permits one union to "transfer its engagements" to another if it has carried a resolution to that effect by a two-thirds majority at a delegate conference.

separation is maintained, with B.I.S.A.K.T.A. responsible for the payment of benefits and the I.S.T.C. for wage negotiations. It would be possible, therefore, for the *National Union of Blastfurnacemen*, which did not participate in the amalgamation, to affiliate to the I.S.T.C. along with B.I.S.A.K.T.A. and maintain its separate identity.

Thus the development of industrial unions in Britain has been one, but only one of the results of a general process of amalgamation, which has concentrated the main body of trade unionists into a few large unions. Some of them were not created with any conception of industrial unionism as the ideal form of organization and none of them have been completely successful in occupying the whole of their chosen sphere. There is also no obvious trend towards their supplanting other structural types of organization. If anything, the balance of advantage appears to lie with the general workers' unions, because, for good or ill, their principle of organization is the most flexible.¹

Non-Manual Workers' Unions

The development of trade union organization among non-manual workers needs to be considered separately. Here the traditional, theoretical distinctions between the various types of union structure appear to have least relevance. Where non-manual workers are strongly organized—as is the case with civil servants, local government officers, teachers, railway clerks, draughtsmen, and many sections of those employed in the amusement trades—it is usually on occupational lines. Some of these associations, as already explained, constitute the main body of trade unionists which remain outside the ambit of the T.U.C.

One noticeable trend in this field of trade union organization is associated with the growth of a union consciousness among workers who originally believed that they had little in common with wage-earners and therefore did not share the same need for protective organization. It finds expression in the gradual transformation of professional associations into trade unions.

¹See J. D. M. Bell: *Industrial Unionism: A Critical Analysis*, University of Glasgow, 1949.

An outstanding example of this development, although there are several parallels, is provided by the history of the National Association of Local Government Officers. With the setting up of the National Health Service, which has changed the status of most doctors to that of salaried employees, the British Medical Association has also taken over many of the negotiating functions which are the essential characteristic of a trade union.

There is also a tendency for some well-established non-manual workers' unions to extend the basis of their organization into related fields of employment. The industries nationalized by the Labour Government of 1945 have all set up separate negotiating machinery for their clerical and administrative employees and this has helped to promote their organization. So we found the Railway Clerks' Association at its annual conference in 1950 deciding to change its name to Transport Salaried Staffs' Association in keeping with its extended organizing activities among clerical employees in road transport.

Industrial Federations

So far in examining the structural changes in British trade unionism, we have noted mainly the part played by amalgamations in promoting larger organizations and closer trade union unity. We now turn to an equally important feature of the organic process which has brought about co-ordinated action in a movement remarkable for its diversity, the growth of industrial federations. Of these the three most important are the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives and the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation. The need to present a common front to the employers in negotiations made some kind of joint organization essential among the large number of unions in the industries they cover. The federal form of organization had the advantage of enabling the various types of unions involved to work together. The general workers' unions, for example, affiliate to the federations for that part of their membership which is employed in the industries concerned.

The Printing and Kindred Trades Federation came into existence in 1899. All the seventeen unions concerned with this

industry, including the National Union of Journalists and a few small unions which are not affiliated to the T.U.C., belong to it. The Federation has found a useful field of activity in the Printing Joint Industrial Council, composed of forty union and forty employers' representatives, which deals with such matters as apprenticeship selection and training, employment and production, and the strengthening of organization on both sides of the industry. It has no formal authority in wage negotiations, which are conducted by the separate unions, the craft unions reserving to themselves the right to fix their own apprenticeship quotas, but it often exercises a co-ordinating influence. An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1949 by the Federation to work out agreed proposals for a new wages structure.

The National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, formed in 1918, is the most highly developed of the federations; it includes all unions with a marked interest in building and construction. This industry has a large number of separate craft unions; the woodworkers, the bricklayers, the painters, the plasterers, the plumbers, the slaters and tilers, the street masons, the wood-cutting machinists, the constructional engineers, the asphalt workers, all have their own organizations. But national wage negotiations are conducted mainly by the Federation, with its own full-time regional officers and the authority to call out on strike any of its affiliated membership locally without prior consultation with the individual unions. The existence of a National Joint Council for the Building Industry, with a well-defined procedure for negotiation and conciliation, has contributed greatly to the success of the Federation.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions is the largest of all the industrial federations with forty affiliated unions representing over 1,250,000 workers in this complex of industries and trades. For many years it did not include the largest union in the field, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, but with the affiliation of this body in 1947, it can now be regarded as fully representative. It undertakes wage negotiations with the employers' federations in engineering and shipbuilding on behalf of most of its affiliated

unions—the non-manual workers' organizations, e.g. the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, do not participate—and has put forward proposals for the reform and simplification of the wages structure in the engineering industries.

The industrial federations which exist in cotton and woollen textiles are on the whole weaker and looser organizations. The cotton unions are among the oldest in Britain with powerful and inflexible traditions. In many ways their form of organization is unique, the result of the wages system in the industry. As far back as 1853 the Bolton spinners and the Blackburn weavers succeeded in establishing organized collective bargaining on the basis of jointly negotiated piece-work price lists for various kinds of work. The principle of the Uniform List, which bound various employers in the same district to pay the same piece-work prices to their employees, was gradually extended over the greater part of the industry—only in the last few years are these lists gradually being superseded by new pay arrangements based on a more accurate calculation of the work load. The success of this wages system depended upon the computation of the wages of thousands of operatives by separate calculations based on the extremely complicated Lists. This has been the main work of local union officials, who after 1861 were usually selected by competitive examination. Their contact with the union members has been intimate and their influence great.

Thus union organization in cotton textiles took the form of numerous local and district associations catering for the various occupations. Today there are still some 150 self-administered, largely autonomous local unions. With few exceptions they are all members of seven federations, known as amalgamations, each confined to a particular occupation or group of occupations. The largest of these is the Amalgamated Weavers' Association with over 70,000 members. Only the five amalgamations in the manufacturing section of the industry are members of the Northern Counties Textile Trades Federation, which concludes agreements with the manufacturers' association, the two spinners' amalgamations dealing separately with the employers. All the amalgamations are members of the United

Textile Factory Workers' Association, but this body has been mainly concerned with political action, although in recent years it has been responsible for concluding agreements on hours of work and holidays.

In the wool textile industry there is one large union, national in scope and catering for a variety of trades, the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers. But there are also some twenty other local organizations, many of which cater for skilled workers, managers, overlookers and woolsorters, all with an average membership of less than 1,000. In the woolcombing section of the trade the National Union of General and Municipal Workers has a substantial membership and competes with the N.U.D.B.T.W. The National Association of Unions in the Textile Trade links all these unions together mainly for the purpose of negotiating national agreements with an employers' council, although its executive has no constitutional powers to prevent the affiliated unions entering into separate agreements.

The existence of many separate unions does not make the integration of industrial policy an easy matter even where strong federations exist, but over the years there has certainly been a progressive development towards closer unity of action and the lessening of inter-union conflict. This has been helped forward by the creation of Joint Industrial Councils for negotiating and other purposes after the First World War, which have on the whole improved inter-union as well as union-employer relations. The Staff Side of the Civil Service National Whitley Council, for example, performs some of the functions of a federation of civil service unions; it has a permanent chairman and secretary and publishes a regular monthly bulletin. In the furnishing trades, which were in a chaotic state in the inter-war years both as regards workers' and employers' organization, the establishment of a Trade Board in 1939 stimulated the formation of the National Federation of Furniture Trade Unions.

The reluctance of the British trade unions to make a fetish of any particular type of organization has probably contributed greatly to their strength and sense of common purpose. Flexibility is likely to assist any organization to endure, since the

social environment in which it works is always changing. Where the need for common action arises on the part of several or many unions, large or small, some way can always be found to organize it if there is sufficient goodwill; but goodwill does not flourish when one union is trying to impose its own preference for a particular type of organization upon another.

This is not to deny that difficulties arise on account of the often ill-defined boundaries of competing unions. While the T.U.C. has had considerable success in regulating inter-union competition¹, these difficulties remain particularly acute at workshop level. A dozen or more unions may have members within the same establishment, and it is not unknown for union officers to encourage their workshop representatives to recruit at the expense of other unions. Such tactics do not help to bring about an effective co-ordination of the activities of the various union stewards, although this is clearly desirable when they are dealing with the same employer.

The industrial federations have tried to meet this problem by providing for the appointment of federation stewards and joint committees. But these provisions are not always observed in practice and, when they are, recognition by employers may be denied. This is but one aspect of a general need for improvement in workshop organization.² What is true nationally, however, is equally true at this level. No solution to the problem can be imposed from above. Given the voluntary basis of union organization, there is no substitute for the goodwill of the parties concerned and their readiness to prefer common to sectional interests.

¹See p. 61.

²See pp. 55 ff.

CHAPTER III

INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

Voluntary Basis

By now the reader will have observed how greatly the structural development of British trade unionism has depended upon its voluntary character. But the word "voluntary" may be open to misunderstanding. It does not imply the absence of any form of compulsion in trade union recruitment. In *Industrial Democracy* the Webbs attacked the "strange delusion in the journalistic mind that . . . compulsory trade unionism, enforced by refusal to work with non-unionists, is a modern device". They pointed out that, on the contrary, it was "coeval with trade unionism itself".

"The trade clubs of handicraftsmen in the eighteenth century would have scouted the idea of allowing any man to work at their trade who was not a member of the club. And at the present day it is especially in the old-fashioned and long-established unions that we find the most rigid enforcement of membership. . . . It is, in fact, as impossible for a non-unionist plater or rivetter to get work in a Tyneside shipyard, as it is for him to take a house in Newcastle without paying the rates. This silent and unseen, but absolutely complete compulsion, is the ideal of every trade union."¹

British trade unionism is a voluntary movement in the sense that it has relied primarily upon its own strength and not upon legal sanctions to reduce the number of non-unionists, to obtain recognition from the employers and to counteract the growth of breakaway unions, in short, to establish itself as an effective regulative influence.

What then is the attitude of British trade unions towards the "closed shop"? The answer to this question turns on the

¹1920 edition, pp. 214-5. This and subsequent extracts from *Industrial Democracy* are reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the late Lord Passfield.

TRADE UNIONS

meaning given to the term. In a statement to the 1946 Trades Union Congress the T.U.C. General Council maintained that:

"The 'Closed Shop', in the sense of an establishment in which only members of a particular union can be employed, to the exclusion of members of other unions, is alien to British trade union practice and theory. Congress has never consented to the recognition of an exclusive right to organize by one union where other unions have built up their organization side by side."

Yet at the same Congress the late Lord Dukeston (better known as Charles Dukes), in his presidential address, said:

"The closed shop is nothing new in British trade union practice. It means for us the well-founded claim that workers in an industry or in an establishment covered by union agreements should be in their appropriate unions. . . . It exists today in industries where unionization is so strong that managements are constrained to recognize that the holding of a union card is a necessary condition of employment."

These two views do not conflict but complement each other. Although the trade unions have always sought to prevent employers from engaging non-unionists, where they were strong enough to do so, they have rarely tried to secure exclusive bargaining rights. The very structure of British trade unionism makes this impracticable, since there are no industries and relatively few establishments where only one union organizes all employees. Craft unions have insisted with varying degrees of success that certain types of work should only be executed by their members, but this has been but one aspect of the device which the Webbs called "restriction of numbers", a means of protecting the craft, and the wages and working conditions associated with it.

In contrast to the United States there are few collective agreements in Great Britain, which stipulate that employees must belong to the union or unions which are signatories of the agreement; the compulsion to join a trade union—where it exists—remains largely "silent and unseen". Since the repeal of the 1927 Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Act in 1946, a number of Local Authorities have introduced member-

ship of a trade union as a condition of employment, and many co-operative societies have maintained a similar provision for some time. But generally, whilst many employers are willing to express their preference for employees who are organized and would not risk employing a non-unionist at least in certain occupations, they are not prepared to enter into a formal, binding commitment.

This is also true of the nationalized industries. Coal-mining under private ownership was about the only industry in the country in which agreements existed providing for the employers' deduction of union dues from the workers' wages (known as the "check off" system in the United States). After nationalization the National Union of Mineworkers sought a national agreement which would extend this practice to all coalfields. The National Coal Board was only prepared to continue existing District arrangements for maintaining union membership; in districts where there were no arrangements, they undertook "to tell their officials to do what they could to persuade all workmen to join the Union". Union dues are deducted from wages only where workmen agree in writing to this being done. The reasons given by the Board for this attitude in its *Report and Accounts for 1948* are worth quoting:

"There was now only one employer. To grant the N.U.M.'s request would mean discharging all workmen who did not wish to join the Union, regardless of their efficiency and length of service; these workmen would not merely be discharged from their particular jobs, but from the industry, and they would be unlikely to find jobs elsewhere in which they could use the experience and skill they had gained. Further, if a man were expelled from the Union for a breach of Union regulations, the Union would be able to get him dismissed from the Board's service even though the Board had no complaint against him."

The one industry in which a "closed shop" has been formally and strictly maintained is shipping, where the National Maritime Board, since its foundation as a voluntary body in 1920, has included among its objects: "the establishment of a single source of supply of sailors and firemen jointly controlled by employers and employed."

The enforcement of trade union membership by employers as a result of a collective agreement might seem to be no more than the logical outcome of the unions' efforts to secure the all-union shop as a result of their bargaining power. Yet there is an essential difference between employer and union enforcement even though the former may in the first place be union induced. At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we might say that the voluntary nature of the compulsion is greatly diminished. The unions are assured of their support regardless of their policies and activities, and there is good reason to fear that this may encourage undemocratic tendencies in their own organization. This danger has been well expressed by an American writer referring to experience in his own country:

"... the whole question of the union shop bears far more heavily on the workers than on management. It raises the fundamental problem of the union leader. If the closed shop is necessary for the workers, that is one thing. If it is necessary for the union leader, that is quite another. Unhappily the union shop has been obtained by the leaders *for* the leaders on all too many occasions. Leaders who do not deserve to be leaders find this monopolistic device invaluable in maintaining their power, collecting their dues, and in a general way assuring themselves of maximum safety with a minimum of work."¹

The British trade unions, however, are unlikely to change their course and endanger their voluntary character for a further reason not yet mentioned. An agreement which stipulated union membership as a condition of employment, without specifying the union—and a "closed shop" for one union would usually be rejected on the grounds mentioned in the T.U.C. statement—is likely to raise the question: what is a *bona fide* trade union? This is a ticklish subject which the movement has always preferred to leave within its own jurisdiction.

There are no objective criteria, especially in dealing with the problem of breakaway unions. Most trade unionists would agree with Milne-Bailey in regarding the "splitting-off

¹Russell W. Davenport in his Foreword to *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy* by C. S. Golden and H. J. Ruttenberg, 1942, p. xv.

of a dissident section of a union to form a new organization" as "one of the deadly sins against trade unionism".¹ Every voluntary movement has to develop its own sanctions to maintain its unity and authority, and in recent years non-unionism has been regarded as less a threat to their effective operation by the British trade unions than the disruptive influence of breakaways. Significantly enough the decision of the London Passenger Transport Board in 1946 to require certain of its employees to be members of the Transport and General Workers' Union—which raised a storm of public controversy on the grounds that a Public Board was trying to enforce a "closed shop"—was the result of the union's effort to eliminate the remaining, almost negligible influence of a breakaway union.

The civil service unions have been troubled most by break-away organizations. They cannot use the threat of a strike to prevent such bodies gaining recognition and the Government itself cannot afford to become involved in a discussion of the question of what is a *bona fide* union. It must apply some objective test. Thus the handbook on *Staff Relations in the Civil Service* issued by the Treasury states that: "To secure recognition an association must show that it is representative of the category of staff concerned. In the Civil Service recognition depends solely on numerical strength."

If compulsory trade unionism were made universal either by agreement or by legislation, the same problem would arise. Any dissident body which could obtain sufficient support even among a small section or grade of workers in a particular industry or service would be able to gain recognition. What has so far been treated as a domestic problem of the trade union movement would become a public issue and a very complicated one. This consequence alone is likely to restrain the movement as a whole from pressing a demand for compulsory trade union membership.

Union Government

As compared with the trade unions there is probably no other institution in the country which brings as many people

¹W. Milne-Bailey: *Trade Union Documents*, 1929, p. 81.

into voluntary or part-time service on behalf of their fellows and gives them a first-hand experience of the democratic methods of administration. It is all the more important to know what is the nature and extent of the unions' internal democracy today¹.

The constitutional problem for trade unionism has been the same as that which faces every other democratic organization: how to maintain a system of checks and balances which reconciles leadership with members' control, responsibility with responsiveness. Unions with different histories have weighted the two sides of the balance differently.

The extent of the contrasts can be illustrated with the aid of two examples, which probably represent the extremes on either side. In the Amalgamated Engineering Union every full-time officer is elected by ballot of the members and for a limited period, even the General Secretary has to stand for re-election every three years. The union executive is full-time, so is the union president. It is therefore difficult for any one individual to assume a dominating role. An elected National Committee meets annually to decide union policy and a special Appeals Committee, also elected by ballot, is empowered to reverse the decisions of the executive. In the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation not even the General Secretary is elected; he is appointed for life by the executive, which also appoints all other full-time officials. The executive is elected so as to represent the various grades of workers organized by the union and is part-time. Delegate assemblies, which are not national but regional, are held at its discretion.

The contrasts in the structure of two general workers' unions are also worth noting, in view of their size and influence and of their similar origins. Both unions hold a large delegate conference—the T. & G.W.U. biennially and N.U.G.M.W. annually—which is the supreme policy-making body, but otherwise their organization shows marked differences.

The membership of the T. & G.W.U. is divided into territorial and trade groups for different purposes. The General Executive Council is composed of one representative from

¹The latest and most thorough study is B. C. Roberts: *Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain*, 1956.

each territorial area and of one representative from each national trade group committee, and they must all be "lay" members of the union, i.e. not permanent officials. The two important considerations underlying this structure are: that the workers in each trade group should be able to work out an approach to their own particular problems without being swamped by the possible indifference of other union members; and that all policy decisions should be taken by union members still engaged at their trades. Apart from the General Secretary, who is elected by ballot of all the members and retains his office "during the pleasure of the union", all other permanent officials, including the Assistant General Secretary, and secretaries of the National Trade Groups and the Regional Committees, are appointed.

The N.U.G.M.W., on the other hand, is organized solely on a district basis. Its General Council consists of ten permanent officials—the district secretaries—and fourteen "lay" members who are elected by the District Councils, which in turn are elected by the branch membership. A smaller Executive Committee of ten, of whom half must be "lay", is appointed by the General Council. Eight National Industrial Officers are responsible for the different industrial sections of the membership. All full-time officials are appointed on probation and are subsequently elected to permanent office when they have made themselves known to the members.

Of course the living reality of democratic life in trade unionism, as in every other social institution, does not depend wholly or even mainly upon the rule book. Constitutions apart, there are two main elements in the working of every modern trade union and the relationship between them has a great influence on its vitality and purpose. They are the corps of full-time permanent officials and the active membership. It lies in the nature of things that the official usually exercises a restraining influence on the active members, and they in turn have a stimulating effect upon him. He is conscious of the difficulties of negotiation, of the balance of forces and the economic facts on which the successful execution of policy depends. They are conscious of their interests and are less hampered by the burden of responsibility. The play of

both factors contributes to the success of the union. It is when the equilibrium which has to be established between them is seriously upset that the union becomes either "bureaucratic" or "irresponsible".

In recent years, when "bigness has become suspect", there has been a tendency to identify the dangers of "bureaucracy" with the size of trade unions; the 'Transport and General Workers' Union has been singled out for special attack. In fact the internal democracy of this union compares favourably with that of many other, smaller unions, which partly explains the trouble it has had with unofficial movements. Large-scale organization does present its own peculiar problems in communication and control; if these are not faced the result may be a decline in democracy. But no one seriously suggests that countries must be small for their governments to be democratic; and to make the same judgment about trade unions is equally unjustifiable.

The development of large unions must surely be regarded as inevitable with the enlargement of the scope of collective bargaining. It is true that this has also had certain inevitable consequences which affect the working of internal union democracy. These were simply but aptly stated by Lord Citrine in addressing a conference of Works Committee representatives in the nationalized electricity supply industry:

"Negotiating nationally has necessitated the transference bit by bit of the power formerly possessed by local members and its being placed in the hands of representatives who are entrusted to negotiate on their behalf. The individual member or the individual body of members in the locality cannot alone determine whether an agreement shall be accepted or not. Nor is it easy to consult them at every stage. . . . There are many things being discussed during negotiations which it would be quite improper to have reported at a particular stage. There are circumscriptions and limitations upon what can be said in negotiations. The result is that as a rule the unions and the employers have to go to a certain point with their negotiations before they can report them. . . . It may be that the Executive Councils of the unions have not been conducting the negotiations themselves. They may have had to depute some of their officers or members to take

part . . . (and) may only know the broad trend of discussion before those discussions are carried to a certain point."¹

Thus the actual participation of the membership in what is still the main function of a trade union, the making of a collective agreement, may be reduced to little more than registering their collective consent or disapproval for the finished product of lengthy negotiations. Indeed, there are some unions which do not consult their members before they conclude agreements. It is interesting to compare this modern statement with the conclusions which were reached by the Webbs more than fifty years ago:

"The extreme centralization of finance and policy, which the trade union has found to be a condition of efficiency, has been forced upon it by the unique character of its functions. . . . It is obvious that a uniform policy can only be arrived at and maintained by a central body acting for the whole trade. And thus it comes about that the constant tendency to a centralized and bureaucratic administration is, in the trade union world, accepted, and even welcomed, by men who, in all the other organizations to which they belong, are sturdy defenders of local autonomy."²

The constitutional checks on bureaucracy in the British trade unions are, however, relatively strong. Most of them have annual delegate conferences or the equivalent at which the broad lines of union policy are discussed and decided, in unfettered debate. The passing of resolutions contrary to the executive's recommendations is not an infrequent occurrence. The union executives are usually composed entirely of "lay" members, and where they are not, there is probably provision for the periodic election of union officers.

The most important of the full-time officers in the majority of unions is the General Secretary—only a few unions have full-time Presidents. His power is certainly considerable because of his role in negotiations, and his control—in most cases—of the other full-time officials. Usually he is elected. Whether it is for two, three or five years, for life or "at the

¹*National Negotiations in Industry*. An address by the Rt. Hon. Lord Citrine, P.C., K.B.E., at Buxton, March 1949, published by the British Electricity Authority.

²*Industrial Democracy*, 1920 edition, pp. 102-3.

union's pleasure" seems to make very little difference in practice. Rarely does the union change its General Secretary before he retires; but most unions impose an age limit. His salary most likely brings him an income in excess of that of most of the workers whom he represents, but only in the case of a few trade unions does it rise much above £2,000 a year. For the kind of work he is doing and the responsibility which he carries, he is underpaid by any comparative standards—in the field of public administration, for example, not to speak of his counterpart in the employers' organization.

Nevertheless the emergence mainly in the last half century of a new profession, that of the permanent trade union official has undoubtedly influenced the democratic character of trade union organization. The earlier trade union leader had to stir up a fighting spirit and lead his men into battle. For this he required to be something of an orator and to possess, above all, great force of character. He was in close, daily contact with the workers whom he represented. His life was identical with their own, and providing he spoke their mind and remained loyal to their interests he fulfilled his function admirably. Today the trade union official is primarily concerned with conducting negotiations through established machinery, with avoiding disputes as far as possible and especially breaches of agreements. Most of his work is done in the office. He must be a capable administrator and spend a great deal of his time in explaining and interpreting agreements. To an increasing extent he must now be familiar not only with the circumstances of the industry with which he is concerned, but with the intricacies of the nation's economic policy. In short to do his job successfully he needs to acquire specialized knowledge and skills, although his long apprenticeship in the hard school of experience is still indispensable. But his power has been increased by the greater complexity of the problems which have to be resolved in determining union policy. And frequently his function is to act as an intermediary between the workers whom he represents on the one hand, and the employers or the Government, on the other.

Clearly the methods by which unions select their officials have become of increasing significance. Where they are chosen

by ballot and are not appointed for life, this method still has the advantage of ensuring that they hold the members' confidence, but it also encourages irresponsibility and takes little account of their qualifications for entering a skilled profession. There is today a strong case for the appointment of officials by executives or special selection committees and for ensuring that candidates have had the necessary training for union office, though in this case it is the more important to ensure that policy decisions are made by "lay" representatives of the members if the growth of a bureaucracy is to be avoided. However, the effectiveness of any constitutional checks upon bureaucracy depends in the last resort on the extent of members' participation in shaping union policy and influencing union administration.

Branch and Workplace

The ordinary member has two possible points of contact with his trade union, the branch meeting and his place of work. The branch meeting provides him with an opportunity to participate in the government and administration of the union. Where he works he requires its protection in dealing with his own employer.

In some trade unions, branch and workplace organization are identical. The miners are organized in lodges on a colliery basis and lodge officials are dealing constantly with the colliery manager on behalf of their members, although the workers' checkweighman, whose appointment is legally enforced, also acts as their on-the-spot representative in certain matters. The printers have their traditional chapel organization related to their trades and places of employment, which is the main meeting place of members and the basic unit of their unions' administration. Unions as dissimilar as the National Union of Railwaymen, the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers and the Civil Service Clerical Association organize their branches according to their members' place of employment. But this is not the rule. In many cases the union branch is a geographical rather than an industrial unit constituted according to the members' place of residence and their convenience in attending the branch meeting. It may well

include the employees at several different firms and perhaps not all the members of the union at any one of them.

It has been customary for many years for the "good trade unionist" to bemoan the poor attendance at branch meetings. The organization known as *Political and Economic Planning* (P.E.P.) made a study of this problem admittedly with very inadequate data at their disposal, in which the authors came to the following conclusions:

"The proportion of members turning up to branch meetings is on average low. There is a tendency for a nucleus, largely consisting of the officials, to turn up regularly. Many unions have special quarterly branch meetings, and rank and file members may be fined for not attending these unless they present their excuses; similar *ad hoc* meetings may be called on particular issues of importance to the unions, and it is often at these special meetings that voting is taken, whether for election of officers or, for example, on the ratification of a national agreement. A higher proportion of the membership takes part in the meetings where a vote is taken than in the regular routine meetings, but even so, in the majority of branches and the majority of unions only a fraction of the membership participates. . . . The percentage of the membership voting on various issues has been obtained for sixteen unions. Percentages vary from 2 to more than 30 per cent, but are mainly between 15 and 25 per cent. The general unions, where votes are collected in a different way, appear to muster a poll of about 50 per cent on most occasions. The printers' unions, where voting is taken in the chapels which are based on place of work, show very high polls."¹

In its analysis, P.E.P. attached a great deal of importance to the size of branches which may vary from less than 100 to more than 1,000 members, and suggested "that if the large branches were to be split up into a number of smaller branches the numbers attending branch meetings and taking part in important union business would be nearly doubled." This represents a rather superficial approach to the problem. No doubt attendance would be increased by splitting up the larger branches if only on account of the increase in the number of branch officers, but this would not in itself lead to a keener interest in union affairs or greater efficiency in organization.

¹*British Trade Unionism, Six Studies* by P.E.P., 1948, pp. 24 and 26.

The union branch meeting of today is often so dull an affair that the member not holding any office in the branch who has been persuaded by a keen member to attend comes home with the impression that he has wasted his time. To some extent this is unavoidable. There is a great deal of routine business to be transacted and important decisions are taken at higher levels of authority. Most unions have an insufficient number of permanent officials, who could attend branch meetings and speak with authority on the work and policy of the union. Sometimes an outside speaker is invited to enliven the proceedings, but that is little more than a diversion.

The T.U.C. has suggested that "the right type of educational work is the thing most suited to revitalize branch meetings to keep the member in touch with what is happening in his union and also in the movement generally".¹ But this recommendation has received little attention, although the need for members to know more about the agreements which their union has entered into and the reasons for them is great. If such education is to be undertaken successfully, the unions will have to change their ideas on the amount of money which should be spent on this purpose and on the type of educational activity required. Trade union journals could be an important means of communication between union headquarters and that large majority of members who do not attend branch meetings. Most of them, however, are "produced to appeal to the active member. Little consideration seems to have been given to the problem of capturing the interest of the non-active member".² In practice, it is the shop steward or collector who today provides the main point of contact between the union and its individual members. The main improvements in the internal democracy of trade unions are likely to come from a recognition of all the implications of this fact.

In the past, with a few notable exceptions, the trade unions have paid more attention to branch than to workplace organization. This was understandable fifty years ago, when the branches and district committees were undertaking the main negotiations with the employers and it was an advantage that they were not

¹*Trade Union Structure and Closer Unity*.—Final Report, 1947, p. 26.

²B. C. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

limited to the employees of one concern. But the general shift from local to national bargaining has not only weakened the members' interest in the branch life of their unions, it has also made the link between the worker and his union at his place of employment a decisive factor in establishing the happy mean between bureaucracy and irresponsibility, to which we have already referred. Moreover, full employment, the new interest in raising productivity and the attempt to extend the principle of joint consultation have combined to emphasize the importance of union activity in the individual establishment.

The rules of the great majority of British trade unions do make some provision for the appointment of workplace representatives today, but their functions and their importance vary greatly; in some cases their only job is to collect union dues. The authors of the P.E.P. Report examined the rules of forty-eight unions affiliated to the T.U.C.—with a total membership of 4,500,000—and found that:

“ . . . eighteen have collectors, twenty-seven have stewards or similar workshop representatives (including seven in which these stewards are also collectors), while four others, without having either stewards or collectors, have some organization at the place of work between the member and his branch (for example, the chapel in printing unions). Of the remaining six societies, some cater for very specialist crafts with few members in any one place or, in addition to having a small membership, are confined to one locality.”¹

They also pointed out that “organization on the job is often rudimentary or non-existent. There may be provision for it in the union rules without much being done about it in practice. . . .”

It is mainly in the engineering and allied industries that workshop organization has played and continues to play an important part in union activity. The rules of the Amalgamated Engineering Union or of the Electrical Trades Union, for example, require the appointment of stewards in each working unit, and their range of duties is wide. Piece-work prices and such matters which can be satisfactorily settled only at the workshop level are one of their main concerns, but generally it is their job to see that trade union agreements are observed and other conditions established by local custom

¹Ibid., p. 127.

maintained, as well as to inspect membership cards and to prevent, where possible, the employment of non-unionists.

In the A.E.U.—but this is an exceptional arrangement—they are not only the agents of the union but are also directly represented, in addition to the branches, on the District Committees. Quarterly meetings of all stewards in each district are held at which reports on the state of membership or changes in wages, hours and conditions within the district are discussed. The National Federation of Building Trade Operatives also organizes monthly meetings of “card stewards” on a district basis from all unions in the Federation. Most of the craft unions have stewards. In industries where piece-work prevails the unions are compelled to pay some attention to their workshop organization, although they may prefer to leave these negotiations to permanent officials as in cotton textiles and boot and shoe manufacture.

Of the major unions, the two general workers’ organizations have, in the past, probably been least inclined to encourage stewards to be more than dues collectors outside their large membership in the engineering industry. Sections of the membership in both of them, however—for example, the London busmen and tramwaymen in the Transport and General Workers and the London gasmen in the Municipal and General Workers—have a strong and virile representation at their place of work which the unions recognize.

In default of a proper examination of the practice of the various unions, which would probably have to be conducted by the trade union movement itself, it is difficult to get any clear picture of the present state of workshop representation. It is perhaps indicative of the reluctance of some of the leaders of powerful trade unions to face the problem that such a report has not yet been produced. This reluctance is due partly to the attempts which have been made by the Communist Party and other political groups to foster unofficial movements among the stewards for their own ends, but also, because the opinion still prevails that the strengthening of workshop organization might undermine agreements arrived at nationally or on a district basis or otherwise weaken the authority of the trade unions. But the risks involved in the growth of any kind of

"factory patriotism" have to be weighed against the need for the unions to make their influence felt in the daily lives of the workers. Unofficial movements are usually a consequence of too great a gap between the top leadership and the active rank-and-file members.

It is not enough that union rules formally provide for the appointment of stewards if they are left—assuming they have been elected—to cope with the many difficulties confronting them as best as they can. Their office, although important, is probably one of the least rewarding in the trade union world. It is easy to move a resolution at a branch meeting in favour of a wage increase, but it requires courage, ability and capacity for leadership to stand up to the employer every day and on occasion to the workmates who have elected you when they are being unreasonable.

If the stewards are to act loyally in accord with union policy, they must at least understand the policy. This depends on the provisions that exist for training them and keeping them in close touch with the union's activity as a whole. It is only since the war that some trade unions have taken an interest in a practical type of education designed to equip their lay officers for the better performance of their duties. The 'Transport and General Workers' Union has done pioneer work in this field by means of an integrated system of correspondence courses, two-day schools and full-time courses normally lasting one week. The new Memorial Building of the Trades Union Congress includes a specially planned and equipped training college for short courses of one or two weeks' duration. Until recently, however, British trade unions have been more concerned with helping to extend the general educational facilities available to those of their members who wanted to study. Many of them are affiliated to the Workers' Educational Association (with its allied Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee) or to the National Council of Labour Colleges. These voluntary bodies provide correspondence courses, regular classes and short residential schools in a wide range of social subjects, but they, too, are responding to the new demand for a specific education in trade unionism.

CHAPTER IV

TRADES UNION CONGRESS

Rise of the General Council

The Trades Union Congress has a continuous history from 1868, but it became the co-ordinating centre of British trade unionism only after its reorganization in the early nineteen-twenties. Previously annual Congresses had provided little more than an outing for the delegates and a forum for the expression of union opinion. The Parliamentary Committee, which Congress elected to conduct its business, was weak and ineffective. It worked on an annual income rarely exceeding £3,000 a year and a Secretary and Assistant-Secretary comprised the whole of its staff. With the rise of the Labour Party after the turn of the century, its main function, to watch legislation affecting labour interests, dwindled in importance. In fact, prior to the First World War, the General Federation of Trade Unions—which still exists today although little is heard of it—was of greater importance than the T.U.C. This organization had been established in 1899 by Congress for the purpose of assisting unions affiliated to it when they were engaged in trade disputes. The miners, railwaymen and transport workers had also formed their own Triple Industrial Alliance in April 1914.

The main reason for the reorganization of the T.U.C. was undoubtedly the desire for closer unity of action in the industrial field on the part of the new and larger, amalgamated trade unions. It took place at a time when bitter conflict with the employers over wages had been precipitated by the post-war slump. By the end of 1921 the Triple Alliance had collapsed and the General Federation was obviously not representative enough to meet the needs of the time. Moreover, prior to the slump, there had been an encouraging example of the value of mutual aid. In the railway strike of 1919 a Mediation Committee, composed of representatives of other unions had helped

to bring about a settlement favourable to the railwaymen. It was natural to hope that if the T.U.C. could be strengthened by the creation of an executive authority acting as a kind of General Staff for the forces of organized labour, there would be a better chance of resisting the employers' attacks.

The new constitution which came into operation in 1921, although a compromise which conciliated the craft unions by leaving the autonomy of affiliated organizations untouched, was primarily designed to strengthen the workers' defences. It divided the unions into seventeen trade groups (there have been eighteen since 1946) and gave each group representation upon a General Council—which replaced the old Parliamentary Committee—roughly in proportion to its membership at the time. Although candidates for the General Council had to be nominated by and from among the unions within the relevant group, they were elected by the whole membership of Congress on a card vote, i.e. with the voting strength of each union proportionate to its affiliated membership. In addition two seats on the General Council were reserved for women representatives. The powers of the General Council were further extended in 1924 and 1928, but since then there have been only minor constitutional changes in Congress organization.

Thus the T.U.C.'s present constitution still reflects the prevailing concerns of the trade union movement some thirty years ago. This may be illustrated by the powers of the General Council, which are defined mainly in rules 11, 12 and 13, relating to industrial disputes, disputes between affiliated organizations and the conduct of affiliated organizations.

Rule 11 pledges affiliated organizations to keep the General Council informed in any major disputes in which they may become engaged, either with employers or among themselves. If a peaceful settlement seems likely the General Council cannot intervene, unless requested to do so, but in the event of a breakdown in negotiations or a deadlock, it may give advice to the unions involved. If this advice is accepted and a strike or lockout results, the T.U.C. is under an obligation to organize material and moral support. This rule was the basis of the General Council's action in the 1926 General Strike, but that dramatic event also revealed the weakness of the

arrangement. While the Council was able to conduct the General Strike, it had no power to make an agreement to end the miners' dispute, which was the reason for the sympathetic action. This ambiguous position was one factor, although by no means the most important, leading to the collapse of the Strike and the subsequent recriminatory exchanges between the miners' representatives and other members of the General Council. The rule was amended at the 1955 Congress to allow the General Council to interest themselves in a dispute before a deadlock is reached.

Rule 12, which gave the General Council powers to deal with inter-union disputes, has had a more successful history. At the time, when it was adopted in 1924, this was a serious problem. The 1920 constitution had provided for the setting up of a T.U.C. Disputes Committee. Between September 1923 and July 1924 this committee held some forty meetings, largely concerned with accusations in regard to the poaching of members by rival unions. The new rule insisted on the submission of all such conflicts to the Disputes Committee, holding in reserve the threat of suspension or disaffiliation to secure respect for its recommendations. Congress also adopted a number of "main principles" governing "good trade union practice" in order to avoid inter-union competition for members, which were extended and improved in 1939. Taking these principles as a basis for advice and voluntary arbitration the T.U.C. has had a great deal of success in settling inter-union conflicts without invoking the final sanction provided for in this rule.

Rule 13 empowered the General Council to investigate the conduct of any affiliated organization if it was considered to be "detrimental to the interests of the trade union movement or contrary to the declared principles of Congress", and, if necessary, to suspend its membership until the matter was fully considered at the next Congress. The final sanction of expulsion was reserved for Congress itself. This rule was introduced in 1928, when the National Union of Seamen was expelled for its support of a "non-political" (company) miners' union in Nottinghamshire. The N.U.S. was allowed to reaffiliate again in 1930, after the death of its General Secretary, Havelock Wilson, who had been largely responsible

for this policy. In short, the General Council has made little use even of its limited, formal powers. Instead it has sought to strengthen its authority by the cautious development of an agreed basis for common action.

The steady growth in the moral authority of the General Council has been one of the most significant developments in British trade unionism during the last two decades. In the eyes of the general public, the T.U.C. has come to be regarded as so representative a body that the limits of its powers are frequently forgotten. Those limits are easily defined by the fact that a trade union in affiliating to the T.U.C. does not yield up any part of its autonomy. The General Council has not extended its authority because any of the individual unions were prepared to place in its hands powers which they previously exercised on their own account. It has done so because the increasing participation of the Government in economic affairs has shifted the emphasis from industrial to political action, and the representation of the trade union point of view on any proposed legislation or administrative action can best be undertaken by a central body.

Even here it must be recognized that the T.U.C. has no exclusive rights. If the Government prefers in certain matters to approach a particular union, or if a union decides to make its own independent representations to the Government, the T.U.C. cannot prevent this happening. All that it can do is to insist that if a general trade union view is required on any question no other body is able to provide it, and to try to persuade its affiliated organizations—which it does with a good deal of success—that such a co-ordinated view is to be preferred to several conflicting ones.

The Second World War helped greatly to promote the new relationship between the trade unions and the State which has enhanced the authority of the T.U.C. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, the Prime Minister directed all Government Departments to consult with the T.U.C. before taking any action on matters likely to affect the interests of workpeople. In the following years the complex structure of Councils, Boards and Committees which was created to advise the Government on industrial policy and to assist in the handling of wartime problems was mainly of a tri-

partite character, with the T.U.C. acting as the custodian of the general interests of the workers on an equal footing with the central employers' associations.

Many of these wartime advisory bodies were subsequently converted to meet peacetime needs, and the T.U.C. continued to participate in this way in shaping the nation's economic policy. The most important national consultative bodies on which it is represented together with the employers are: the Economic Planning Board, the National Production Advisory Council on Industry and the National Joint Advisory Council to the Minister of Labour and National Service (together with the smaller Joint Consultative Committee).

Present-day Activities and Problems

One need only glance at the substantial report which the General Council presents to Congress each year to see how the range of the T.U.C.'s activities has been extended. In moving the acceptance of reports which entailed an increase in the unions' affiliation fees¹ at the 1950 Congress the present General Secretary, Sir Vincent Tewson, pointed out:

"... that we have, directly associated with the General Council itself, twenty-seven standing and consultative committees staffed by members of the Council and of affiliated organizations operating directly under the General Council. We have four joint committees with Government Departments and other bodies. There is representation from the General Council or from the Movement in general on sixty Government committees. . . . We are represented on sixteen educational bodies. We are represented directly on six international bodies and twenty-seven miscellaneous bodies. The total number of committees either directly under the auspices of the Council, or whose work comes up for consideration by the Council, is 140."²

When *The Times'* correspondent, in replying to the traditional

¹Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress now pay an affiliation fee of 9d. per member, including an increase of 3d. per member agreed by the 1956 Congress. The decision was taken at a private session, but the reasons given were: higher administration costs, the extra commitments involved in financing the new T.U.C. building, the provision of educational facilities in the new training college, and the general expansion in the work of the T.U.C. at home and overseas.

²Trades Union Congress: *T.U.C. Brighton Congress Report, 1950*, pp. 525/6.

vote of thanks to members of the Press at the conclusion of the 1945 Trades Union Congress, told the delegates—"You have no longer any need to thunder; you have only to whisper and Ministers tremble and Field-M Marshals bend their knees" he was being amusing, but only by expressing extravagantly a recognized fact. "How very far away," indeed, as he said, "are those days when a few top-hatted, frock-coated gentlemen made a promenade of the Government offices in Whitehall respectfully carrying resolutions passed by Congress, leaving them at the door, extremely happy if they saw a permanent secretary, and most handsomely flattered if by accident they stumbled across a Minister."

The procedure of the General Council has been compared with the work of a Local Authority, since much of the detailed consideration of policy and administrative problems goes on in the thirty or so special committees composed mainly of members of the General Council and serviced by the permanent administrative staff of the T.U.C. The meetings of the full General Council, which take place not less frequently than once a month, are mainly occupied with approving, amending or referring back the reports and recommendations of these committees. There are standing committees on organization and on economic questions, on social insurance and industrial welfare, on education and on international affairs. These are composed exclusively of members of the General Council. Other committees concern themselves with the organization and problems of particular groups of trade unionists, such as the National Women's Advisory Committee, the Non-Manual Workers' Advisory Council, the National Advisory Committee for Local Government Service, and are composed of General Council members and of members elected at special delegate conferences or of representatives of unions particularly concerned. On a few subjects, such as colonial affairs and scientific development, the committees advising the General Council also include co-opted experts.

Some observers have suggested that there has been a decline in the authority of the General Council in the post-war years, and have put this down to the loss of Lord Citrine as General Secretary in 1946. Certainly his own personality, his far-

sightedness and skill in debate at Congress, contributed greatly to the leadership of the movement and often held in check the conflicting pressures of sectional interests within the General Council. But two important problems which have had to be faced by the T.U.C. in recent years, its international affiliations—involving the break with the World Federation of Trade Unions and the setting up of the new International Confederation of Free Trade Unions—and the penetration of the communists into positions of influence within the unions during the war, have been brought to a relatively successful outcome.

Bigger issues have been raised by the changes in the economic environment of trade unionism in regard to wages and production policy. These will subsequently be examined in greater detail. Undoubtedly, they have thrown a heavy burden of responsibility upon the T.U.C., for which in many ways it was inadequately equipped. The practical limits of the General Council's purely moral authority over affiliated unions have been sharply revealed in the attempts it has made to give leadership on these issues. There has been a notable return to the use of the device originally employed before and after the General Strike of calling in between Congresses special conferences of union executives to enable the General Council to obtain a mandate for urgent policy decisions and to mobilize adequate support from affiliated unions. But this has not altered the situation appreciably. The gap between the T.U.C.'s policy declarations and the practice of many individual unions has remained.

One obvious weakness in the existing organization would appear to be that the General Council contains only one member, its General Secretary, whose sole concern it is to further the interests of the movement as a whole. It is no criticism of the other members to point out that their first loyalty must be towards their own unions, of which in most cases they are either the general secretaries or full-time presidents. If they are to do the job they are paid to do properly, they can give only a very limited amount of their time and attention to T.U.C. affairs, and the work of the General Council has steadily increased. A resolution was moved by the Amalgamated Engineering Union at the 1947 Congress asking for no more

than an examination of the proposal "that all, or a number of the members of the General Council should be engaged full-time on General Council business", but it was overwhelmingly defeated.

As yet there is no strong demand within the movement for a further reorganization of the T.U.C., such as existed after the First World War. Yet there are many anachronisms in the present rules and standing orders. Even the statement of objects, which was incorporated as the result of the adoption of an "Industrial Charter" at the 1924 Congress, has been largely outmoded by subsequent political developments. Parts of it, such as the demand for a legal maximum working week and a legal minimum wage for each industry or occupation, are actually at variance with Congress policy.

Also, the system of election to the General Council no longer provides even a rough equality of representation for the various trade groups. The cotton group, for example, which in 1950 represented a total affiliated membership of 163,506 has two seats on the General Council, whereas the miscellaneous industries and distribution group with one seat included unions with an aggregate membership of 477,085. These are admittedly the extremes, but there is a clear case for reconsidering the distribution of seats on the General Council, owing to the big changes in the distribution of trade union membership which have taken place in the past thirty years.¹

The listing of these anachronisms only serves to underline the reluctance of most of the trade unions to propose any reform of the T.U.C. structure. It is probably recognized that to tackle any of these problems thoroughly would throw the whole of the present organization into the melting-pot and raise the bigger question of whether the T.U.C. should be turned into a federal organization, on the lines of the central trade union organizations which exist, say, in Scandinavia or Western Germany.

There is something of a vicious circle in this reluctance.

¹To meet this particular anomaly the 1951 Trades Union Congress accepted the General Council's recommendation to increase its number by two and thus provide an additional seat each for the civil service and for the distribution and miscellaneous industries groups.

The smaller unions fear that, with the present constitution, increased powers for the General Council would result in strengthening the position of some of the larger unions, whilst the latter are content to wield the influence which is theirs at present rather than face the prospect of the creation of a central body which might limit their own autonomy. In any case, the self-contained attitude which prevails in most trade unions, because of their varying histories and traditions, constitutes a formidable barrier to the development of wider loyalties in keeping with the needs of time.

Role of the Trades Councils

The local counterparts of the Trades Union Congress are the trades councils. They have a long, honourable but chequered history in British trade unionism. Originally they sprang up in some of the main industrial centres round about 1860¹ as loose federations of trade union branches for mutual support in strikes as well as in organizing and propaganda work, but they also engaged in political activity. One of their number took the initiative in calling the first official Trades Union Congress and collectively they played an important part in its early development. In 1895, however, they were excluded from affiliation to that body in favour of a single representation of the workers through their trade unions, and with the growth of the Labour Party their local political significance dwindled. Only with the General Strike in 1926 did they experience a real revival when the need for this form of local industrial organization was made abundantly apparent.² Subsequently

¹Trades councils existed before 1860, but few can trace a continuous history back beyond that date; most of the earlier ones bore different names, e.g. in London, the Metropolitan Trades Union.

²"The hour of glory for the Trades Councils came in the General Strike of 1926, when, either directly or through Councils of Action which they took the initiative in creating on a broader basis, they assumed the task of local organization and responsibility for the conduct of the strike. A great many of them, during this period, issued local newspapers or bulletins to replace the regular newspapers. . . . They issued permits for goods to be delivered to hospitals and for other necessary services; they improvised special transport services and conducted intensive propagandist campaigns in the neighbouring villages. On the whole, this work, improvised in a few days without any sort of preparation, was done with remarkable skill and efficiency, and showed large reserves of strength and competence in the local leadership. . . ." G. D. H. Cole in *British Trade Unionism Today*, 1939, p. 187

the T.U.C. started a campaign to encourage their growth and to bring them into closer alignment with Congress, so that they might act not only as the local co-ordinators of trade union activities, but also as its local agents.

In 1955 there were 527 trades councils (recognized by the T.U.C.) in England and Wales. Affiliated to 523 of them were 14,927 union branches paying affiliated fees on a total membership of about 2,620,000. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the trades councils are not associated with the T.U.C., but remain directly affiliated to the Scottish and Irish Trades Union Congresses.¹ It is possible, therefore, to make only a rough comparison with the total membership of the trade unions affiliated with Congress, since this includes their Scottish and Irish membership. Such a comparison shows that less than half of the relevant union membership is linked locally with the trades councils.²

This fact already points to the most important feature to be grasped about the organization of trades councils, namely, that they are in every sense of the word the most "voluntary" part of the movement. The majority of trade unions recommend their branches to affiliate to the relevant trades councils, but few instruct them to do so. Where a trades council exists, it is not compelled to register with the T.U.C., but in doing so it accepts certain obligations in regard to its rules and activities. It would, of course, be very difficult for any trades council to function successfully in England and Wales except under the auspices of the T.U.C., and there is no record of

¹This separate organization of the trade union movement in Scotland and Ireland, though formally independent of the Trades Union Congress, does not confine the authority of that body to England and Wales. The greater part of the membership of the Scottish T.U.C. is drawn from the Scottish branches of all-British trade unions which through their national headquarters are also affiliated to the T.U.C., although it does include a number of local unions, in the textiles, building and printing trades and among the bakers and teachers, but most of these also belong to the T.U.C. The situation in Ireland is more complicated. Apart from the Irish T.U.C., to which a number of all-British unions are affiliated, there is a rival organization, known as the Congress of Irish Unions, which was the product of a split in 1943.

²This can be no more than a guess, since the trade union branches affiliated to trades councils do not always pay affiliation fees on behalf of the whole of their membership.

any council continuing to operate for any length of time outside this nexus. Nevertheless—as the T.U.C. points out in its *Trades Councils Guide*—“the absence of compulsion . . . ensures a loyalty to Congress principles and policy which no other system could produce.” Finally, almost the whole of the work undertaken by officers of trade councils is voluntary—not more than five or six of the larger councils have a full-time secretary. They are not wealthy bodies; in 1955 only 59 of them had an annual income exceeding £100.

Most of the trades councils meet monthly and their main activities are concerned with the local representation of their members' interests. They organize union recruiting campaigns and bring concerted pressure to bear on employers who are flouting trade union conditions. Some, but not many, have special Women's Advisory Committees, which concern themselves with the special problems involved in the organization of women workers. They appoint representatives to such bodies as Local Employment Committees, Insurance Advisory Committees and Hospital Management Committees. For obvious reasons the potential scope of their activities has been greatly widened by the growth of the “Welfare State”.

There is co-operation between the trades councils and the local labour parties, but based on a mutual respect for their separate spheres of activity. In some cases, for historical reasons, there still remain in existence Trades and Labour Councils—as, for example, in Sheffield—to which trade union branches, local labour parties and co-operative organizations affiliate. But they are compelled by law to have two separate funds, one for industrial and one for political purposes. Trades councils include among their objects the promotion of suitable educational, social and sports facilities for adult workers, but owing to their limited resources they are usually unable to undertake much work of this kind.

It is in their relationship to the T.U.C. that most confusion and controversy has arisen among trades councils. The T.U.C. has done much to encourage and support them. Since 1925 it has arranged a special annual conference of trades councils where their delegates can freely express their opinions by means of resolutions which are not, however, binding upon the T.U.C.

At this meeting they elect six representatives to a Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee, which also includes six representatives of the General Council, and acts as the advisory committee on all matters affecting trades councils. The T.U.C. in addition organizes a special summer school for trades council secretaries and arranges for them to visit headquarters to gain personal contact with the administrative staff.

Difficulties arise mainly through an unwillingness of some trades councils to accept the role, cast for them by the T.U.C., of being policy-executing rather than policy-making bodies. Policy is made by Congress at which the trades councils now have no representation beyond appointing one fraternal delegate. But where members of a trade union branch feel frustrated, by their incapacity quickly to influence the policy of their own union, and, through its delegates to Congress that of the movement as a whole, there is a natural temptation to look upon the trades councils as providing an easier alternative for getting a resolution passed on national policy even if it has little effect except, perhaps, on local opinion.

The trades councils are the only organizations through which the T.U.C. can make direct contact with the rank-and-file of the movement, to inform them on its common policy and problems. Conversely, a geographical as distinct from an industrial breakdown of trade union opinion on matters of economic and social policy affecting the interests of the workers would be helpful to the T.U.C. in determining its attitude to any impending legislative or administrative action. Unfortunately there has been a marked tendency on the part of some powerful trade unions—or their leaders—to regard any strengthening of the trades council machinery as a threat to their own sovereignty. This narrow outlook has so far blocked the acceptance of a suggestion, canvassed at the end of the War, that the T.U.C. should open regional offices each with a full-time official in its employ to work in close touch with the trades councils and trade unions in the area and help them deal with local problems. Without some such provision it is clear that the small administrative staff of the T.U.C. can do little to service the trades councils in their day-to-day activities.

In England and Wales the trades councils are grouped into twenty-two federations varying greatly in size. The effectiveness of the work of these federations is hampered for the same reason as that of the councils themselves—lack of resources. The T.U.C. has in fact been compelled to develop alternative regional machinery. In 1940 conferences were convened of all full-time trade union officers in each of the wartime Defence Regions for the purpose of electing an Emergency Committee of twelve. They had no specific terms of reference but were intended mainly to deal with any emergency arising from enemy action. After the war they were reconstructed in accordance with the same procedure and renamed 'T.U.C. Regional Advisory Committees. They have been used for selecting union representatives on the Regional Boards for Industry.

International Affiliations

One of the duties of the T.U.C. General Council is "to enter into relations with the trade union and labour movements in other countries with a view to securing united action". For nearly a century (since the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864), trade unions and other labour organizations have come together in international associations for co-operation and mutual support. The history of the international labour movements is too large and too complex a subject even to be given in outline here.¹ There are few countries in the world where trade unions do not exist in one form or another, but their aims, methods and organization vary. These differences have naturally influenced their relations with each other. So, too, has the course of their governments' foreign policies. During two world wars the international labour movement has been disrupted and reduced to a mere skeleton. What follows, then, is no more than a brief explanation of the present situation.

A convenient starting point is the World Trade Union Conference held in London in February 1945. It was representative of practically all the national trade union centres in the world, with the notable exception of the American Federation

¹For further information see Lewis L. Lorwin, *The International Labor Movement*, 1953.

of Labor, which was unwilling to associate with the Russian unions or, at that time, with its domestic rival, the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The conference decided to set up a World Federation of Trade Unions with the General Secretary of the T.U.C. as its first president. The W.F.T.U. was an attempt, inspired by wartime co-operation, to find some basis of unity among the trade unions in the democratic and communist countries.

A break soon came with the launching of the Marshall Plan. While the democratic unions supported the new Economic Recovery Programme, the communist unions opposed it. After bitter exchanges, the T.U.C. and the C.I.O. withdrew from the W.F.T.U. and, together with the A.F.L., took steps to form a new international. At the end of 1949 the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was founded, to be composed of "free and democratic trade unions, independent of any external denomination". The affiliation of most of the other democratic national trade union centres was rapidly secured, with the result that the W.F.T.U. passed wholly under communist control. After having been expelled from Paris in 1951 and requested to leave Vienna in 1955, it now has its headquarters in Prague. About 90 per cent of the eighty million members which it claims to represent belong to the trade unions in communist countries.

Although the W.F.T.U., as originally conceived, might be regarded as a victim of the Cold War, it is doubtful whether it had sufficient unity of purpose to sustain co-operation. Despite all the policy differences among the trade union movements in the democratic countries, they exist to protect their members' interests and to do so by opposing, where necessary, both governments and employers. The trade unions in the U.S.S.R. and other communist countries have an entirely different social function. They are an integral part of the State machinery for economic planning without any real independence of action. Although a pretence of collective bargaining has been maintained in recent years, their main task is to stimulate the workers to increase their output. Instead of protecting their members, they are an instrument through which the ruling Communist Party can broaden its influence among the industrial workers.

'This relationship is openly acknowledged, as when the Eleventh Congress of Soviet Trade Unions in 1954 declared that they "always have been and will be faithful and active executors of the policy of the Communist Party . . . their wise leader, inspirer and organizer."

At its Fifth World Congress in 1957, the I.C.F.T.U. reported a membership of 54 millions, drawn from 92 different countries and territories. The three largest national centres affiliated to it are the American A.F.L.—C.I.O. (one body since the merger in 1955), the British T.U.C. and the German D.G.B.; together they account for a little more than a half of its total membership. One of the articles in its constitution guarantees the autonomy of member organizations. Subject to this provision, broad policy is settled at a Biennial Congress, which also elects an Executive Board of some thirty members on a basis of proportional representation from all parts of the world. The Executive Board meets twice a year and is responsible for carrying out Congress decisions; matters requiring urgent attention between its meetings are referred to a small emergency committee. The headquarters of the I.C.F.T.U. are in Brussels where a staff of more than seventy persons is headed by a general secretary, an assistant general secretary and, since 1956, a director of organization.

A particularly important feature of its constitution was the provision made for the setting up of regional machinery. Separate regional secretariats with their own staff had been established for Europe, Latin America and Asia before the Second Congress met in 1951. The first African Regional Conference was held in January, 1957, and prepared the ground for a similar development there. This regional machinery is related to what, from the start, was recognized to be the main task of the I.C.F.T.U.—to encourage the growth of free trade unions in the economically less developed countries. A special voluntary fund for regional activities was established in 1953 and two years later contributions to it were made obligatory. A large part of the resources are in fact devoted to educational programmes. A residential college for training union officers by means of short-term courses was opened in Calcutta in 1952, but similar courses have been arranged in the other

regions and the opening of a central college in Brussels is planned.

Apart from its contributions through the I.C.F.T.U., the T.U.C. has done much to support the young trade unions in the colonial, or what were formerly colonial, territories within the British Commonwealth. The General Council has had a Colonial Labour Advisory Committee since 1937, but from 1950 onwards it has substantially increased the funds devoted to this work. Practical aid has been given in the form of books and equipment, grants for premises and transport; it is now being extended to direct assistance in organizing and negotiation.

When the I.C.F.T.U. was formed the position of two other forms of international trade union organization had to be considered—the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions and the various International Trade Secretariats. In some countries, notably in Western Europe, but also in Canada and Latin America, trade unions have been organized on a denominational basis. These unions have been combined in two internationals, the smaller one of Protestant denomination and the larger International Federation of Christian Trade Unions with a Roman Catholic outlook. The I.F.C.T.U. had been re-organized in 1946 with an affiliated membership of more than two millions. As the aim of the I.C.F.T.U. was to include all free trade unions without regard to race, colour or creed, it decided at its foundation Congress to admit the separate Christian trade union centres provided they did not belong to another international. Most of them refused to accept this condition and the I.F.C.T.U. was not dissolved. The proposal made by the I.F.C.T.U. in 1952 that they should have a liaison committee was rejected by the I.C.F.T.U., which was prepared to enter only into informal co-operation on specific issues.

The International Trade Secretariats are international associations of individual trade unions in particular trades and industries. Some of them have existed for more than half a century. When they were revived after the war the W.F.T.U. tried hard, but unsuccessfully, to incorporate them into its organization as trade departments. The split in 1949 made them cherish their independence more than ever. They had already established their own permanent co-ordinating committee,

which negotiated without delay an agreement with the Executive Board of the I.C.F.T.U. Under the agreement the I.C.F.T.U. recognized the right of the Trade Secretariats to full autonomy in the conduct of their internal affairs and to full jurisdiction in trade and industrial matters. They in turn recognized its right to formulate and execute general policies which they would respect. An arrangement was made for reciprocal representation on the governing bodies of both sides to link them more closely together, while the officials of the Secretariats and the I.C.F.T.U. meet regularly in a joint Consultative Council. There are in all nineteen International Trade Secretariats recognized by the I.C.F.T.U. and, in April 1955, they reported a total membership of 30 millions. The three largest are the International Metalworkers' Federation (7,000,000 members), the International Transport Workers' Federation (4,600,000 members) and the Miners' International Federation (2,500,000 members).

The growth of the trade union internationals has been assisted by the development of inter-governmental machinery, where they have found a useful field of activity. The International Labour Organization, in particular, has been an instrument through which they could bring pressure to bear on governments for a universal raising of labour standards. Founded in 1919 and originally attached to the League of Nations, it was brought in 1947 within the framework of the United Nations as a specialized agency of its Economic and Social Council. The I.L.O. brings together representatives of governments, employers and trade unions at an annual International Labour Conference which adopts Conventions and Recommendations. The Conventions resemble legislation, but are subject to ratification by a member country before they come into force. The Recommendations are statements of policy. During the post-war years the I.L.O. has extended its work in a number of new directions, which include a programme of technical assistance, special conventions for colonial peoples and the setting up of separate industrial committees.

CHAPTER V

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Its Nature and Evolution

As in other industrial countries, trade unions in Great Britain came into being, established themselves on firm foundations and extended their power and social influence mainly as agencies for collective bargaining. This is to say they succeeded as a form of organization which enabled employees—at first only wage-earners but later also salary-earners—to regulate and thus improve their wages and working conditions. All the activities which the trade unions have undertaken and all the other purposes they have acquired must be regarded as a by-product and auxiliary to this their major activity and purpose, since success in it has been the condition for their survival and the basis of their growth. Any theory of trade unionism which disregards this fundamental fact is bound to go astray; in all probability it will be substituting for the realities of social life the social philosophy of its authors.

Today collective bargaining remains the foremost concern of the British trade unions and of the vast majority of their members. The prediction of the Webbs in their *Industrial Democracy* that the method of legal enactment would gradually though not entirely, replace the method of collective bargaining with the advance of what they called "collectivism" has not so far been fulfilled.¹ Wherever the trade unions have been strong enough to regulate wages and conditions by direct

¹According to the Webbs, the Doctrine of a Living Wage would gradually prevail over the Doctrine of Supply and Demand in the assumptions of British trade unionism, and this would mean the establishment of a National Minimum—"the deliberate enforcement, by an elaborate Labour Code of a definite quota of education, sanitation, leisure and wages for every grade of workers in every industry". The trade unions would "more and more assume the character of professional associations" and "may even come to be little concerned with any direct bargaining as to sanitation, hours or wages, except by way of redressing individual grievances, or supplying expert knowledge as to the effect of proposed changes." (See chapters "The Assumptions of Trade Unionism" and "Trade Unionism and Democracy".)

negotiation with the employers they have invariably preferred to dispense with government assistance. That is why it is not illegal in this country to employ an adult male twenty-four hours a day outside of a few special industries like coal-mining; the Factories Acts apply only to the hours of work of women and young persons. Similarly in recent years the unions have strongly opposed the application of any kind of national wages policy which would involve the Government in having a greater say in the outcome of negotiations. Political action has always been employed by the trade unions to support rather than supplant industrial action.

One way of looking at collective bargaining is to note that its effect is to impose limits on the freedom of the employers to run their business as they think fit. Such limits could also be imposed by legislation, as in part they are by the Factories Acts and by statutory wage regulations. But collective bargaining, as has so often been said, rests on consent. The limits are set by voluntarily negotiated agreements, which in this country have not even the legal force of a business contract, although their provisions may expressly or by implication become the terms of the individual contract of employment. There may not always be a written agreement. In certain industries, notably in engineering and iron and steel manufacture, many local conditions of work and even some wage rates are determined by custom although they are the subject of collective bargaining.

The employers' acceptance of these limits to their freedom of action was not gained merely by the use of persuasion on the part of the trade unions. Most employers did not from the start take kindly to collective bargaining as a method of settling the wages and working conditions of their employees. Their opposition had first to be broken down mainly by strikes on the issue of union recognition, although later, government intervention also helped, more especially during the two world wars. In fact collective bargaining rests not only on consent—that is but a partial statement of the truth. It also rests on the capacity of trade unions to withhold the labour of their members, a form of economic power which is exercised in the negotiation of agreements as well as in the conduct of strikes.

Once employers had been brought to recognize trade unions, however, then both they and the unions had a common interest in avoiding unnecessary conflict by adopting an agreed procedure for negotiation and the settlement of disputes. Moreover the extension of the bargaining process from the individual works first to a district, and then to the whole of an industry, brought with it a decided advantage to the efficient employers, the assurance that their competitors could not undercut them by paying lower rates of wages.

The significance of collective bargaining to the workers might be summed up in the word, self-protection. It enabled them to protect their interests in relation to their employment in three ways. First of all, in the presence of a reserve army of unemployed, it eliminated the competition which would otherwise exist among them to offer their services at a lower price than their fellow-workers for the sake of securing employment. Secondly, by the application of their collective strength they could in favourable conditions compel employers to concede wage advances and other improvements in their terms of employment. Thirdly, collective bargaining by introducing something of "the rule of law" into industrial relations protected individual employees against arbitrary treatment by management in the form of favouritism or victimization. This protection could perhaps have been given to them by the State through labour legislation, but at the time when collective bargaining first developed there was little prospect of such assistance forthcoming. In any case those workers who had the possibility of building up strong organizations have naturally preferred to rely upon a form of regulation which comes more under their direct control.

The voluntary system also had distinct social advantages which have helped it to gain so decided and widespread an acceptance today. It is a form of self-government and as such promotes the democratic virtues of independence and responsibility. Moreover it has the great merit of flexibility. It would be impossible for industry to operate with a sensitive regard for the varied human interests of all the equally varied categories of workers by means of regulations imposed by an outside authority. Industrial processes are constantly changing and

with them the conditions of employment. In every workshop there is a host of detailed problems which affect and interest the workers and can only be settled satisfactorily by organizations intimately connected with them.

Collective bargaining is concerned with the negotiating of agreements which regulate terms of employment, but also with the settlement of disputes which may arise between employers and their workpeople either out of the interpretation of agreements or out of matters not regulated by agreement. These are in fact two separate processes, which in other countries are more clearly distinguished than in Britain. Where collective agreements can be enforced by legal action, disputes as to their interpretation can come before the courts. In the Scandinavian countries and in Germany, for example, there are special Labour Courts which are competent to adjudicate in industrial disputes arising out of the validity, existence, interpretation or application of collective agreements. In the United States "grievance procedure", although established by agreement between the unions and the employers, is quite distinct from the procedure for the negotiation of agreements; while the former usually provides in the last resort for the use of arbitration it is rarely employed in the latter. In Britain disputes arising in individual establishments are usually dealt with by an agreed procedure but mainly by trying to find an acceptable compromise rather than by a "lawyer's decision" depending on the interpretation of words. This indeed is another aspect of the flexibility of the voluntary system in this country.

If the negotiation of agreements is not the whole of collective bargaining it is certainly the most important part, and the coverage and the contents of the agreements define the scope of the bargaining process. Broadly speaking the evolution of collective bargaining so far has been towards a progressive enlarging of its scope in both respects. It began with agreements which settled some of the terms of employment for the workers in one trade in one particular workplace. Today national agreements are signed which apply to all classes of manual workers engaged in the whole of an industry. At the same time there are still many district agreements in operation

and agreements which relate only to one firm. Even in a nationalized industry like coal-mining, wages and working conditions are regulated by the combined effect of colliery, district and national agreements as well as various legal provisions.

On the whole the trade unions have been more inclined than the employers to press for national bargaining, although the initiative has come from both sides. It is an interesting question how far this was the result of mass unemployment. Clearly it was of advantage to the unions to create a solid line of defence when they were resisting wage reductions. Under full employment the position is reversed. Individual firms anxious to attract labour are sometimes keen to raise wages above the nationally negotiated rates; a new significance has been given to bargaining at works level. This is particularly noticeable in engineering.

For obvious reasons the pressure for extending the range of subjects dealt with by collective agreements has come almost wholly from the trade unions, although even today the vast majority of agreements—apart from those dealing with bargaining procedure—are mainly concerned in one way or another with wages and hours of work. They do not, of course, relate only to minimum or standard rates of wages and the length of the normal working week, but also to piecework arrangements and other systems of payment by results, to overtime and payment for holidays, and sometimes include provisions for a guaranteed week. Other matters which may be dealt with by collective agreements in this country include the employment of apprentices or juvenile labour, training schemes, job demarcation and distribution of work, discipline and promotion. But in contrast to the United States they rarely deal with compulsory union membership, security of employment according to seniority or work-sharing principles, or employer-financed welfare benefit schemes, although these matters may sometimes be the subject of collective bargaining in individual establishments. More recently, but mainly in the nationalized industries, pensions for manual workers have become a bargaining issue for the first time.

No theoretical limit can be set to matters which may be regulated by joint agreement between employers and trade unions, although the attempt has sometimes been made to formulate one. The well-known preamble to the 1922 procedural agreement in the engineering industry—"The employers have the right to manage their own establishments and the trade unions have the right to exercise their own functions"—has little meaning. The trade unions in exercising their own functions necessarily limit the managerial rights of the employers. Any managerial decision which affects the welfare of their members is a matter of concern to them. How far they attempt to extend their "frontier of control" depends partly on their power to do so, and partly on whether they consider it expedient to acquire the responsibilities involved. Where the frontier lies in practice is often difficult to determine because of the many unrecorded agreements and customs within individual undertakings.

Various Bargaining Procedures

Most of the older, basic industries in this country have evolved their own characteristic procedures for negotiation and the settlement of disputes. Such industries as coal-mining, iron and steel manufacture, engineering and shipbuilding, railways, building, cotton textiles, printing and boot and shoe manufacture, reveal considerable diversity in their methods of conducting collective bargaining.

In all of them trade unions had become well established, at least among manual workers, before the First World War, and—with the exception of the railways—had for decades been recognized by the organized employers. Negotiations took place mainly on a local basis, but *ad hoc* joint bodies had been formed for this purpose. The war gave a great impetus to national negotiations in some of these industries, but when in 1917 the Whitley Committee recommended the setting up of Joint Industrial Councils in all well-organized industries, to provide a standard type of national joint organization with a written constitution and defined functions, most of them did not accept this proposal. The reasons varied but not the least

important was the fact that they already had their own arrangements for collective bargaining. Nevertheless the trend towards centralized negotiations conducted between the headquarters of the trade unions and of the employers' associations continued in the inter-war years, and with it came later a great readiness to accept a commitment to resort to arbitration in the event of failure to agree.

The building industry provides a good illustration of this development. The principle of national regulation was first accepted by both sides of the industry in 1919 for hours of work, and in 1920 for wages and other conditions of work. This agreement resulted in the formation of a National Wages and Conditions Council for the Building Industry, which changed its name to National Joint Council for the Building Industry in 1926. One of the tasks of this joint body is the "grading" of towns and districts for the purpose of regulating wages and "working rules" nationally, while allowing for differences in local circumstances. Originally there were seventeen grades, but in 1947 they were reduced to six. A uniform rate is fixed for all craftsmen in each grade; and the labourer's rate bears a fixed relationship to that of the craftsman. Nine Regional Joint Committees also exist in England and Wales—there has been an entirely separate Joint Council for Scotland since 1930—but their powers are limited. The most important is that of introducing "variation amendments", or proposals to alter national rules in so far as they affect a particular region, but such alterations must be ratified by the National Council.

A revision of the Council's constitution in 1932 provided a conciliation procedure for dealing with all disputes arising between the federated employers and the unions. Previously it could only concern itself with disputes arising out of the interpretation of its own decisions. Up to 1940 if the two sides of the Council disagreed a special joint committee could be appointed to work out a settlement or the question could be referred to arbitration, but only by mutual consent. Subsequently this arrangement was modified to provide that failing settlement by other means "it shall be the duty of the Council to refer the matter to arbitration".

With the compulsory reorganization of the railways into four main line companies in 1921 they also acquired a highly centralized system of negotiations which was given statutory support until replaced by a voluntary agreement in 1935. Despite the nationalization of the industry these arrangements were not revised until 1956. At the national level there is now a Railway Staff Joint Council with four sections for salaried, locomotive, traffic and general employees. Any proposal to vary a national agreement, including a wage claim, has first to be considered by this body. Failing settlement the next stage is the Railway Staff National Council, consisting of eight representatives of the British Transport Commission and an equal number from the three railway unions. If agreement is not reached here, either side can refer a dispute for arbitration to the Railway Staff National Tribunal, providing they notify the other side. Previously, such a reference could only be made with mutual consent. At lower levels there are Sectional Councils and Local Departmental Committees which deal mainly with the local application of national agreements. This procedure does not apply to employees in the railway workshops who have their own separate arrangements for negotiation.

In the coal-mining industry the question whether there should be national or only district negotiations over wages was a leading issue in the bitter conflicts which took place in this industry in the inter-war years, the coal-owners maintaining that national wage rates were impracticable because of the varying financial circumstances of the different coal-fields. It was not until the Second World War, when in 1942 the newly created Ministry of Fuel and Power took over the operational control of the mines, that a new approach was made to the settlement of wages and conditions "on a national basis by a properly constituted national body". The recommendations of a government-appointed Board of Inquiry led first to the establishment of a national minimum wage, and then, in May 1943, to the setting up of a National Conciliation Scheme for the industry. A National Negotiating Committee representative of both sides of the industry was formed, but in the event of this committee failing to reach an agreed settlement on any question referred to it, a National Reference

Tribunal, composed of persons not engaged in the industry, was empowered to make a binding decision.

The nationalization of the coal mines in 1946 left this machinery intact. It was supplemented, however, by a Pit Conciliation Scheme, adopted by national agreement at the beginning of 1947, "to provide for the speedy settlement of disputes arising in individual collieries". The main point of this scheme is to prevent what are essentially local disputes from becoming the subject of protracted, district or national negotiations or, as frequently happens, the cause of unofficial strike action. Such disputes, if they cannot be settled by negotiation in the colliery concerned, are referred—according to a strict time-table—to a joint District Disputes Committee, which if unable to agree, refers them to an Umpire, selected from an agreed Panel, for a binding decision.

Compared with those industries already mentioned, iron and steel manufacture, engineering and shipbuilding, retain a far more complex system of negotiations. In each of them wages and conditions of employment are regulated by a bewildering tangle of national, district and works agreements and by customs and decisions which have not been expressed in written agreements.

In engineering, for example, both employers and workers are gathered together in single federations for negotiating purposes, the Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (though many firms remain outside the employers' organization and some have their separate agreements with the unions), but no permanent joint body for negotiation exists. National and district negotiations take place by the calling of special conferences on the initiative of either side. There are no nationally agreed rates for men, although there are for women, and some of the district rates have never been embodied in agreements. In some districts agreed rates have been established only for craftsmen and labourers, although "semi-skilled workers"—the unions prefer to describe them as "skilled machine operators"—form the largest category of workers in the industry. There are, however, national agreements on the "national bonus"—a method of securing a

nationally uniform increase in the various district rates introduced during the First World War and originally called "war bonus"—on the length of the working week, overtime, payment by results and other matters.¹

The one agreement which lays down a formal arrangement for conciliation in the industry was signed in June 1922 and is still in operation. This defines a procedure for avoiding disputes and "for dealing with questions arising" mainly in individual establishments. Disputes if not resolved at the works level by the shop stewards or at a works' conference may be brought before a Local Conference between the local employers' association and the local representatives of the unions, to be held within seven days unless otherwise agreed. Should the question still remain unsettled either party has the right to bring the matter before a Central Conference held each month, usually at York. The agreement provides that there shall be no stoppage of work, either partial or general, until the whole of this procedure has been exhausted, but there is no provision for arbitration at any stage.

In boot and shoe manufacture an agreement signed as far back as 1895, though subsequently amended and amplified, has regulated the pattern of joint relations in the industry ever since. The most important feature of this agreement was the reconstruction of Local Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration, consisting of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers, granting them full powers to settle all questions submitted to them concerning wages, hours of labour and conditions of employment and providing for arbitration by independent umpires in the event of their failing to agree. This arrangement facilitated a speedy settlement of local disputes in a piece-work industry where changing fashions call for frequent adjustments of piece-rates. Another and unique feature of the settlement was the establishment of a trust deed providing a financial guarantee for the carrying out of the agreement. The federated employers and the union each deposited £1,000 to provide a fund from which damages

¹The agreement between the federated employers and the unions signed in November 1950 established *consolidated* (i.e. including national bonus) minimum wage rates for adult male timeworkers, while maintaining existing district and craft differentials, merit rates, etc.

could be claimed by either side if a strike or lock-out lasting more than three days took place in violation of the agreement. It is doubtful, however, whether this provision has had more than a symbolical significance.

With their original emphasis upon local settlements joint relations in boot and shoe manufacture might be thought to resemble those in cotton textiles. But both sides of the industry have been well organized in single bodies for a long time. Since 1895 there has been a steady shift of emphasis to national negotiations. Today the Local Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration are mainly concerned with considering complaints and fixing piece-rates for the district they cover according to the terms of national agreements. They are not permitted to make any agreement or award that is less favourable generally to the operatives than the wages, hours and conditions contained within national agreements. These not only fix a minimum time rate but also stipulate that piece-work prices must be fixed to enable the average operative to earn not less than a certain percentage above the time rates. National negotiations are undertaken by joint conferences held every two years which is the normal period for the duration of agreements, both sides binding themselves not to open up wage questions in the interim.

There is greater uniformity in the arrangements for collective bargaining in those industries and services which have formed Joint Industrial Councils. What the Whitley Committee originally proposed was that the Government should help to set up a three tier form of joint organization composed of a National Joint Industrial Council, District Joint Industrial Councils and Works Committees in all industries where both employers and workpeople were adequately organized. This proposal was not only intended to smooth the way for orderly negotiations but was broadly conceived as a means of "promoting industrial harmony and efficiency". The Whitley Committee gave a list of topics which it considered proper subjects for discussion in the councils, including such matters as the better utilization of the practical knowledge and experience of the workpeople, the statement of the general principles governing the conditions of employment, means of ensuring

to the workpeople the greatest possible security of earnings and employment, methods of fixing and adjusting earnings, piece-work prices, etc., technical education and training, industrial research, improvement of machinery and organization of work and proposed legislation affecting the industry.

The Ministry of Labour sent out a letter to trade unions and employers' associations in October 1917 explaining the scheme and carefully pointing out that it "indicated no intention to intrude an element of state interference which had hitherto not existed in industry; in fact the councils would be autonomous bodies and would in effect make possible a larger degree of self-government in industry". While offering its assistance to any industry wishing to form a Joint Industrial Council, the Government left the employers' associations and trade unions concerned to adapt the scheme to their own preferences and requirements. Between January 1918 and December 1921, seventy-three Joint Industrial Councils were established, and thirty-three Interim Industrial Reconstruction Committees, a less formal type of organization which it was hoped would pave the way for the setting up of a Joint Industrial Council.

Many of these bodies failed to survive the period of industrial conflict which ended with the General Strike. According to Professor J. H. Richardson, the chief causes for the breakdown of the Councils were "wage conflicts, weakness of organization of employers and workpeople, and divergence of interests between different localities, between different sections of an industry and between large and small undertakings".¹ By 1932 only fifty-one Joint Industrial Councils remained in existence and only twenty of them had district or local joint bodies associated with them. Some were meeting irregularly and most of them confined their activities to regulating wages and working conditions. The fate of the Works Committees was even less fortunate. It was estimated that between 1917 and 1922 more than 1,000 Works Committees were formed, but by 1925, the great majority of them had ceased to function, and those that continued to exist had little or no working relationship with the district and national councils.

¹*Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (I.L.O. Report), 1938 edition, p. 137.

The Second World War produced a new crop of Joint Industrial Councils since organized industrial relations were needed in planning the war economy and were encouraged by the Government in many ways. Altogether fifty-six of them were established or revived during the years 1939-46, making a total of 111 in existence at the end of 1946. By the end of 1950 their number had further increased to 130. The most important fields of employment covered today by Joint Industrial Councils or their equivalent are: public administration, including national government and local authorities; public utilities, gas, water and electricity; and transport other than railways. They are also to be found in a wide range of manufacturing industries, including bricks, cement, hosiery, chemicals and flour milling, where they serve as the main machinery for collective bargaining. In a few other industries, of which printing and boot and shoe manufacture are examples, Joint Industrial Councils exist alongside separate and more traditional arrangements for negotiation. Officers of the Ministry of Labour attend the meetings of many of the Councils and assist them in their work.

Statutory Wage Regulation

The Trade Boards Act of 1909 was the first, cautious attempt by the State for over a century to intervene in wage determination. The Industrial Revolution and the acceptance of the doctrine of *laissez-faire* had led to the abandonment of earlier statutes giving local magistrates the power to regulate the wages of artisans in their district. Various Factory Acts had done something to regulate the hours of labour of industrial workers, and to improve the standards of health and safety in the workshops, but wages were regarded as sacrosanct, a matter to be settled by "free contract" between the parties immediately concerned. Only after strong public feeling had been aroused by twenty years' agitation against the appallingly low wages paid to home workers and those employed in the so-called "sweated" trades did the claims of humanity make a slight breach in the current tenets of economic theory. Under the 1909 Act, the Government was empowered to set up a board to fix minimum wages for time-work and piece-work in any trade where the prevailing rate of wages was "exceptionally

low as compared with that in other employments". Four such Trade Boards were formed in 1910 and four more in 1914, covering in all about 500,000 workers.

An important change in this system was recommended by the Whitley Committee and given effect in the Trade Boards Act of 1918. The Minister of Labour could now make an Order for a Trade Board if he was "of the opinion that no adequate machinery exists for the effective regulation of wages throughout the trade". The emphasis was shifted from unduly low wages to the absence of adequate voluntary organization, and the scope of statutory wage regulation was correspondingly extended. Between 1919 and 1921 no fewer than thirty-seven new Trade Boards were set up. Recognition had been given to the principle that those workers who could not hope to improve their wages by their own organization were entitled to legal protection, but designed in such a way as to encourage, as far as possible the growth of voluntary effort. The trade unions were thus safeguarded against a weakening of their own organization, and the better employers, willing to pay higher wages, against the competition of firms prospering on sweated labour.

The Trade Boards consisted of an equal number of employers' and workers' representatives in the trade, together with three independent members, including the chairman. All members were appointed by the Minister of Labour at his discretion, but the practice developed for him to ask for nominations from trade unions and employers' associations in trades in which there was some degree of organization, and the great majority of the representative appointments have been made in this way. The recommendations of the Trade Boards only became effective when confirmed by the Minister after time had been given for objections to be lodged. He could refer back their recommendations for further consideration but could not himself fix rates. Once confirmed, the minimum rates became legally binding upon all employers in the trade, and the Ministry employed a special staff of inspectors to see that they were observed. Employers paying lower rates were liable to fine and imprisonment as well as to the payment of any arrears of wages due to the workers.

Statutory wage regulation was extended to agricultural workers in England and Wales under separate legislation introduced by the 1924 Labour Government,¹ but otherwise after the early twenties it did little more than hold the ground it had gained until the approach of the Second World War, though large numbers of workers still had neither a legal minimum nor a negotiated wage. Indeed, the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee reported in 1938 that there were many cases where persons with large families worked for less than they would have received from unemployment benefit. In 1937 the regulation of agricultural wages was extended to Scotland; in 1938 special Wages Boards, with powers of statutory enforcement, were introduced into road haulage, and the Holidays with Pay Act empowered Trade Boards (and other statutory wages boards) to give directions providing for holidays with pay up to one week in the year; in 1938 and 1939 a few new Trade Boards came into existence, notably in baking, rubber manufacturing and the furniture trades.

It was left to Mr. Bevin, as Minister of Labour in the war-time Coalition Government, to enlarge the system of statutory wage regulation, both by extending its scope and by strengthening the powers of the bodies undertaking it. This was accomplished under the Catering Wages Act of 1943 and the Wages Councils Act of 1945. The first of these measures provided for the establishment of a permanent Catering Wages Commission with the responsibility of examining the arrangements for the regulation of wages in any branch of the catering industry and of recommending the setting up of a Wages Board where such arrangements were found to be inadequate. By 1947 five such Boards had been formed, covering all the more important sections of the industry, although one of them was not re-constituted after 1950.

The Wages Councils Act renamed the Trade Boards to "remove the stigma of being associated with the sweated trades" as the Minister explained to the House of Commons,

¹The Corn Production Act of 1917 had previously introduced a legal minimum wage for farm workers and Central and District Wage Boards, but these provisions had been discontinued in 1921.

and widened their jurisdiction on wages to the fixing of "minimum remuneration" in place of "minimum rates". This enabled them *inter alia* to make provisions for a guaranteed week and thus protect the workers against the practice of employing them at the prescribed rates on short time. Furthermore, the activities of the Wages Councils were no longer restricted mainly to questions of pay—they could also advise the Minister on such matters as training, recruitment and working conditions. In fact they assumed many of the functions of a Joint Industrial Council.

The main field of employment, which came under statutory regulation for the first time, after the passing of the Wages Councils Act, was retail distribution, in which nine Wages Councils have been formed regulating the wages of some 1,250,000 workers. The quantitative significance of this step can be gauged by a comparison: approximately the same number of workers were employed in all the industries covered by the fifty-one other Wages Councils already in existence in 1947. The Catering Wages Boards, whose composition and powers are the same as those of the Wages Councils, brought at least 500,000 workers under legal protection.¹ Apart from retail distribution, clothing and laundries, certain textile, metalware and food-processing industries are among the main fields of employment in which Wages Councils operate. Taking agriculture and catering into account, as well as the industries subject to the jurisdiction of the fifty-eight Wages Councils existing at the end of 1955, the number of workers whose wages and working conditions are now subject to statutory regulation must be in the neighbourhood of 4,000,000, although some of them are also covered by collective agreements.

When the Trade Boards were first formed they were regarded with serious misgivings by many trade unions. It was thought that any form of statutory regulation of wages would tend to weaken trade union organization by encouraging the workers concerned to rely upon authority rather than their

¹The Catering Wages Boards were converted into Wages Councils by the Terms and Conditions of Employment Act, 1959. A part from agriculture, all statutory wage regulation now comes under the consolidating Wages Councils Act, 1959.

own efforts to improve their terms of employment. Experience has steadily diminished these fears. In 1931 when the unions were losing members a serious clash of opinion developed within the Trades Union Congress on the question whether Trade Boards were helping or hampering trade union organization. This led to an inquiry by the T.U.C.'s Trade Boards Advisory Council. No convincing evidence was produced to support the view that the Trade Boards were responsible for the decline in union membership and it was agreed not to recommend the abolition of any of the existing Trade Boards. Since then no further opposition has been openly expressed within the trade union movement.

It is true that some unions have a far greater interest than others in statutory wage regulation. The number of nominees on Wages Councils on the part of organizations affiliated to the T.U.C. in June 1955, was as follows:¹

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers . . .	215
National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers . . .	139
'Transport and General Workers' Union . . .	131
National Union of General and Municipal Workers . .	112
National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers	27
Twenty-nine other unions	185

As typical of current opinion, at least among those trade unions particularly concerned with the utilization of the statutory machinery, we can take the following statement by the Assistant General Secretary of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers after the first Wages Orders had been made in retail distribution:

"It is well over thirty years ago since the demand for a statutory wages foundation for the distributive workers was first raised. Since then, the harsh school of experience has proved how right the Union was when it argued that legally enforceable minima were necessary to underpin its voluntary agreements. . . . The Union has never accepted statutory minimum terms as a satisfactory substitute for trade union agreements. But neither has

¹This list does not include the National Union of Agricultural Workers on account of the separate machinery for statutory wage regulation in agriculture.

it shut its eyes to the facts of life in the retail distributive trades. The complex and diverse character of retail distribution has made it necessary to establish a system of wage regulation capable of enforcement on all employers of labour. It is sometimes argued that Wages Councils undermine trade union organization. That is a policy of despair. It is wrong to accept the view that it is impossible to organize on the basis of work done by the Union on a statutory wage-fixing body. If that view were correct how, for example, is the experience in the agricultural industry to be explained? Here trade union organization has increased eight-fold since statutory wages machinery was first established in 1924. Our job is to see that the Union is identified with the work of the Wages Councils in the eyes of the shop worker. We must make it impossible for the uninformed or the ill-intentioned to get away with the idea that it is 'the Government' and not the Union that is responsible."¹

Since the Wages Councils fix only minimum wages, the trade unions can extend their organization by securing higher rates through collective agreements with the larger and better organized firms in the industry. Their vigilance is also required, in addition to that of government inspectors, to ensure that nothing less than the statutory rates are paid and to claim the arrears due to a worker who has been underpaid. Naturally the efforts of the trade unions are directed towards lifting a trade or industry out of the Wages Council class. Under the 1945 and 1948 Acts the Minister of Labour may abolish a Wages Council at the joint request of the organized workers and employers concerned on the grounds that statutory backing for wage agreements is no longer necessary. This has happened in the furniture manufacturing industry.

In supporting the voluntary system the Government has increasingly used its influence to aid the trade unions in other ways. One of the means employed has been the "Fair Wages Clause" which was first introduced into government contracts in 1891. In 1909 it was reformulated by a House of Commons resolution to provide that contractors "shall, under a penalty of a fine or otherwise, pay rates of wages and observe hours of labour not less favourable than those commonly recognized by employers and trade societies (or in the absence of such

¹*New Dawn*, 1st October, 1949.

recognized wages and hours, those which in practice prevail among good employers) in the trade in the district where the work is carried out". So it remained until substantially amended in October 1946. The revisions extended its application to sub-contractors, made the main standard of fair wages that established by representative collective agreements or by arbitration awards, and added "conditions of labour" to wages and hours, including the freedom of workers to be members of trade unions. In a series of Acts providing financial assistance to industries from the Public Exchequer, beginning with the British Sugar (Subsidy) Act, 1925, the same principle has been applied. Local authorities also have Fair Wages Clauses which apply to their own contracts.

On one occasion legal force has been given to voluntary negotiated agreements, under the Cotton Manufacturing Industry (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1934. This was an exceptional measure applied to an industry faced—in the words of the Board of Inquiry's report—"with the possible collapse of the whole principle of collective bargaining". Yet it was in a way the precedent for a very significant part of the wartime Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, 1940, which made it obligatory for every employer to observe terms and conditions of employment not less favourable than those which had been settled by agreements made "between organizations of employers and trade unions . . . representative respectively of substantial proportions of the employers and workers in the trade in the district in which the employer is engaged", or by the decisions of Joint Industrial Councils or similar bodies, or by arbitration awards.

The initiative remained with the trade unions (theoretically also with employers' associations) to see that this obligation was fulfilled. There was no system of inspections or prosecutions as with the Wages Councils. If any employer appeared to be infringing the regulation, he could be reported to the Minister of Labour who had then to refer the question to arbitration. If the award was given in their favour, the workers concerned could then sue their employer for the amount their wage packet was short of the recognized remuneration. This arrangement proved of great value to the trade unions in forcing those

employers into line who had previously refused to bargain with them. It was also an aid to union organization.

Use of Conciliation and Arbitration

We have seen how in many industries collective agreements lay down the procedure to be followed for the settlement of disputes, both local and national. The Government has also gradually extended its provisions for the avoidance of industrial conflict. After a number of abortive experiments in compulsory arbitration before the trade unions had attained proper legal status, the first important step in this direction was taken with the passing of the Conciliation Act of 1896. This allowed the Government to inquire into the causes and circumstances of any existing or impending trade dispute, and to appoint a conciliator or arbitrator, the former on application of either party and the latter at the request of both parties to the dispute. The Whitley Committee suggested that a permanent court of arbitration was needed as well as *ad hoc* courts of inquiry, but rejected compulsory arbitration. The Industrial Courts Act of 1919 carried out this recommendation.

Thus after the First World War the Ministry of Labour had the authority to assist in the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes by use of any of three methods: conciliation, voluntary arbitration, or special inquiry—usually in that sequence. It employs a staff of conciliation officers, whose job it is to help both parties to settle their differences amicably if their advice or assistance is requested, although generally they do not intervene before an attempt has been made to reach a settlement without their help. Failing agreement the dispute can then be submitted with the consent of both parties to the Industrial Court established by the 1919 Act. The cost of the Court is borne by the Government and no charge is made to industry for its services. In practice it consists of a permanent President, appointed by the Minister, and two other members, one from each of the panels representing employers and work-people. Despite its name, it is no part of the British judicial system and its decisions are not enforceable. Nevertheless it has gained the reputation of being a genuinely independent tribunal—it is not subject to any form of government control—

and only on rare occasions have the disputants refused to accept its findings. In addition to this permanent institution, the Minister of Labour can also appoint single arbitrators or special *ad hoc* Boards of Arbitration, if this course is likely to prove more acceptable to the contesting parties.

The third method, the appointment of a Court of Inquiry, is only employed as a last resort and does not require the consent of the parties. It is primarily a means of informing Parliament and public opinion of the facts and underlying causes of a dispute. It may be a post-mortem examination of a strike that has taken place or last-minute action to avert an impending stoppage. Usually the recommendations of a Court of Inquiry, although they cannot be enforced, provide a basis for further negotiations and a settlement.

In the inter-war years, 1920 to 1938 inclusive, 1,669 arbitration settlements were made by the Industrial Court and 315 by single arbitrators or *ad hoc* Boards of Arbitration appointed by the Minister of Labour. In addition 1,199 conciliation settlements were reached under the Ministry's auspices. Only twenty Courts of Inquiry were appointed and sixteen of these were held before 1926.

One writer¹ has made an interesting comparison between the results of the Industrial Court's decisions and the outcome of strikes and lockouts in the period 1919-1932, the stormiest years in Britain's industrial relations, which yields the following amazingly close parallel:

1919-1932	In favour of		Compromise	Total
	Employers	Workpeople		
Industrial Court Awards ..	540 (35%)	337 (22%)	650 (43%)	1,536 (100%)
Results of Strikes and Lockouts ..	2,692 (35%)	1,683 (23%)	3,106 (42%)	7,481 (100%)

The percentage figures certainly suggest that it mattered little to either side whether a settlement was obtained by arbitration or by direct action. Since the arbitrators were usually con-

¹Ducksoo Chang: *British Methods of Industrial Peace* (Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. 167-8.

cerned to find an award that would be sufficiently acceptable to both parties to avoid a trial of strength, and thus to anticipate its probable outcome, this is not surprising. It should be realized, however, that after 1920 the use of the Industrial Court was largely confined to particular industries, engineering and shipbuilding, railways and other transport, civil service and public utilities, which together were responsible for 791 awards out of a total of 963 between 1921 and 1932.

The use of arbitration in settling differences between Government Departments and the Civil Service trade unions on questions of pay and conditions of service merits separate consideration. There is no law forbidding civil servants to strike, but the nature of their employment hardly permits them to do so without serious consequences. At first it was argued that compulsory arbitration was incompatible with the Whitley Council machinery, but in 1925 an agreement was reached between the Official and the Staff Sides of the National Whitley Council "that failing agreement by negotiation arbitration shall be open to Government Departments on the one hand, and to recognized Associations of Civil Servants . . . on the other hand, on application by either party, in regard to certain matters affecting conditions of service."

Up to 1936 the Industrial Court was used for this purpose, but in that year a special Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal was constituted on similar lines. Only claims involving employees whose salaries exceed a fixed upper limit, affecting the highest grades, may not be taken to arbitration except with the consent of both parties. The Government also reserve the right to refuse arbitration "on grounds of policy"; in fact it has done so only on one policy issue, that of equal pay for men and women. Otherwise the subjects which are arbitrable are defined in the agreement as "claims affecting the emoluments, weekly hours of work and leave". Within these limits the Government is pledged to give effect to the arbitration awards subject only to the overriding authority of Parliament, an inevitable constitutional qualification which is taken to mean that "the Government will not itself *propose* to Parliament the rejection of an award, once made".¹

¹H.M. Treasury: *Staff Relations in the Civil Service*, 1955 edition, p. 21.

TRADE UNIONS

After the outbreak of the Second World War, a general system of compulsory arbitration was superimposed on the voluntary provisions for the settlement of disputes already described. The 1940 Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order—often referred to as Order 1305—prohibited strikes and lockouts connected with trade disputes, with the proviso that they were legal if the Minister of Labour, having had the dispute reported to him, failed to take action within three weeks to secure a settlement. It also established as a final authority for the settlement of disputes a National Arbitration Tribunal, normally consisting, for the purposes of any particular case, of three appointed members (including the Chairman) and two representative members, one from each of the trade unions' and employers' panels. The Tribunal was not intended to displace or to weaken the established practices of collective bargaining or voluntary arbitration. Under the Order the Minister was obliged to see that any existing joint machinery suitable for settling the dispute was used before referring the case to the National Arbitration Tribunal. Any awards or decisions made as a result of such references by the Minister of Labour, whether under any agreed procedure or by the National Arbitration Tribunal, became legally binding.

On one point the power of the Tribunal to make a binding award was challenged by a High Court decision. In what has come to be known as the Crowther case in 1947 it was ruled that the Tribunal had no power to make an award compelling employers to reinstate dismissed workers. The Lord Chief Justice pointed out that even if employers in deference to an award took men back into their employment, they could not be prevented from giving them notice the next day.

The trade unions first accepted this system of compulsory arbitration as a wartime necessity. They were not, however, in spite of their various criticisms, generally dissatisfied with its working. Many unions, particularly the smaller ones or those with membership in poorly organized industries, were thankful for the opportunity which it gave them to force reluctant employers either to negotiate or to come before the Tribunal and be bound by its award. So it came about that there was no strong trade union demand for the withdrawal

of the Order at the end of the war. The Trades Union Congress, though refusing to commit itself in favour of compulsory arbitration as a permanent arrangement, readily consented to its temporary retention in the post-war years in view of the economic difficulties which continued to confront the nation.

Not that Order 1305 prevented strikes from taking place. In the ten-year period 1941-50, there were more than 17,000 industrial disputes leading to stoppages of work in the United Kingdom, but most of them were strictly local in character and of short duration, the average dispute involved less than 300 workers and lasted about four days. There was in fact little attempt to enforce the law against striking. During the war years there were in all 109 cases of prosecution of workpeople, involving 6,281 individuals, and two of employers for taking part in an illegal stoppage of work. After the war it was not until 1950, when some of the leaders of a gas strike in North London, which was causing the public considerable inconvenience, were brought before the Courts, that the Attorney-General made use of his powers. In justifying his previous reluctance to prosecute, Sir Hartley Shawcross told the House of Commons:

"The law laid down by that Order . . . is not always easy to apply to all industrial disputes in peace time. If one prosecutes too soon it may only exacerbate the difficulties and impede the opportunities of settling the dispute by negotiation or arbitration. Prosecution may result in the individuals proceeded against being made martyrs in the opinion of their colleagues, and instead of leading to the observance of the law it may produce even greater disregard of it and so bring the law further into disrepute."¹

It is generally recognized that the threat of criminal prosecution is about the worst method imaginable for maintaining industrial peace, and to maintain a legal prohibition and not apply it brings the law into disrepute. These considerations no doubt led the Government to consider revising Order 1305. Moreover, the prosecutions were causing trade union opinion to turn against it. At the 1950 Trades Union Congress a resolution moved by the National Union of Railwaymen urging "the Government to discontinue immediately" the Order, though

¹*Hansard* (House of Commons Official Report), 29th January, 1951.

defeated on the recommendation of the General Council, four strong support. In August 1951 it was replaced by a new Industrial Disputes Order (1376) which removed the penal prohibition on strikes and lockouts but retained limited provisions for compulsory arbitration.

The Industrial Disputes Tribunal, which has taken the place of the National Arbitration Tribunal—though similarly constituted—considers “disputes” and “issues” referred to it by the Minister of Labour, and its awards become an implied term of contract between the employer and the workers to whom an award applies. The definition of a “dispute” given in Order 1376 is narrower than that given to a “trade dispute” in its predecessor and excludes the Tribunal from considering disputes concerned with the employment or non-employment of any person or the obligation of a worker to belong to a trade union. The new term “issue” is used for a dispute as to whether a particular employer should observe “recognized terms and conditions of employment” in the district. Employers are no longer placed under a general and absolute obligation in this respect, as they were when Order 1305 was in operation, but since this obligation could then only be enforced by an award of the National Arbitration Tribunal, the trade unions appear to have retained the substance of this support to their voluntary efforts.

The other, rather complicated provisions of Order 1376 have been designed “to strengthen the authority of existing voluntary systems of negotiation and arbitration and to uphold the sanctity of agreements and awards”. Disputes can only be reported to the Minister for action by adequately representative trade unions and employers’ associations (or by individual employers where the dispute is between them and the workers in their employment). Previously, they could be reported “by or on behalf of either party to the dispute”. The change was intended to prevent the Order from being used by individual employees or by splinter groups within the unions. To safeguard the voluntary system the Minister, where “he is of the opinion that there is suitable machinery of negotiation or arbitration” to settle a reported dispute and “all practical means of reaching a settlement through that machinery have not been exhausted,” is

under an obligation to refer the dispute to that machinery. And when subsequently it has been settled, either by voluntary agreement or by an arbitration award, it cannot then be referred to the Industrial Disputes Tribunal. That body cannot, in other words, act as a Court of Appeal.

What makes Order 1376 so novel an experiment in government intervention is its attempt to combine compulsory arbitration with freedom to strike and to lock-out. The "compulsion" is qualified by this fact. Normally the Minister of Labour is unlikely to refer a dispute for a compulsory award when one of the sides is so opposed to such a reference that it is willing to resort to aggressive action.¹ To meet such a situation the Order specifically provides that "where action is being taken by either of the parties . . . designed to compel the acceptance of terms or conditions of employment which are the subject of the dispute" the Minister *need* not refer the dispute to the Industrial Disputes Tribunal. He can also stay the proceedings if a reference has already been made. Yet clearly there are many cases, especially in spheres of employment where collective bargaining is of recent growth, in which the parties, although unwilling to engage in a strike or lock-out, cannot agree on a submission to voluntary arbitration.²

The introduction of statutory arrangements for compulsory arbitration encouraged the acceptance of provisions for the use of arbitration in voluntary agreements. Some instances have already been mentioned. In all the nationalized industries unresolved disputes may be referred to arbitration on the initiative of one of the parties; two of them—coal mining and railways—have their own arbitration tribunals. Some national negotiating bodies have an independent chairman who may be called upon to act as an arbitrator when conciliation fails. The constitution of many Joint Industrial Councils or similar standing bodies provides for a final reference to arbitration, mentioning perhaps the Industrial Court or an individual arbitrator

¹A notable exception was the bus strike in July, 1957.

²Despite T.U.C. opposition Order 1376 was terminated in 1958, but an equivalent of the "issues" procedure was re-introduced under the Terms and Conditions of Employment Act, 1959. This gives the Industrial Court power to make compulsory awards in settling claims based on the failure of employers to observe "recognized terms or conditions of employment".

appointed by the Minister of Labour, or leaving the authority open for mutual agreement. According to a statement made by the Minister of Labour in 1954, out of a total of 152 industries (excluding those with statutory wage fixing or with the central government as an employer) 75 had procedural agreements with arbitration clauses. Of these there were 51 in which the parties had agreed in advance to refer unresolved disputes to arbitration; in the remaining 24 they had stipulated that disputes might be referred.¹

The danger of compulsory arbitration is that it may weaken the readiness of the parties to reach their own agreements. Even during the years when Order 1305 was in force this danger was largely avoided. The total number of cases reported under the

*Various Arbitration Awards and Conciliation Settlements under Ministry of Labour and National Service from 1939 to 1955*²

Year	Industrial Court	National Arbitration Tribunal or Industrial Disputes Tribunal	Single Arbitrators, Boards of Arbitration, etc.	Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal	Conciliation Settlements
1939	25	—	10	11	100
1940	38	50	26	6	300
1941	71	120	43	3	550
1942	39	121	62	5	390
1943	41	195	95	7	350
1944	62	188	58	6	240
1945	46	142	34	4	220
1946	39	91	37	1	200
1947	43	132	29	2	227
1948	76	154	34	9	362
1949	48	188	51	16	403
1950	43	201	27	21	299
1951	68	222	47	36	330
1952	71	215	31	33	320
1953	64	178	31	33	353
1954	59	185	23	32	255
1955	40	128	16	34	243

¹*Trades Union Congress Report 1954*, p. 239.

²Compiled from the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.

Order was 4,510. Of these only 2,092, or less than half, were referred to the National Arbitration Tribunal. As many as 1,745 cases were either withdrawn or settled by agreement between the parties as a result of intervention by the Ministry of Labour's conciliation officers. The remainder were dealt with by voluntary arbitration, or were settled by joint machinery within the industry, or were pending when the Order was withdrawn. The table opposite gives the numbers of arbitration awards and conciliation settlements made under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour throughout the period 1939 to 1955. It will be seen that, although compulsory arbitration has been resorted to more frequently than voluntary arbitration, there have been few years when the number of conciliation settlements has not exceeded the total number of arbitration awards. During the same period there have been forty-four Courts of Inquiry, an average of between two and three a year.

But counting the number of arbitration awards does not tell us very much. One award may cover less than a hundred, and another more than a million employees; they can hardly be said to have the same significance. There are, too, no figures available for the number of agreements which are concluded without any kind of intervention from the Ministry. A more telling comparison of the extent to which arbitration has been used to settle wage disputes during the post-war years can be derived from the Ministry's annual estimates of the total amounts secured in weekly wage increases by various methods of settlement. These show that over the ten year period, 1946 to 1955, more than 73 per cent of the total could be attributed to voluntary agreements (including the automatic increases due to the operation of sliding scales); 18 per cent to the decisions of statutory bodies (Wages Councils etc.); and less than 9 per cent to arbitration awards.¹

The growth of organization on both sides of industry, the strengthening and extension of their joint arrangements for collective bargaining,² and their greater readiness to accept

¹See table on p. 113 for the proportions year by year.

²Since the end of war some four-fifths of all employees have been covered either by voluntary or by statutory forms of wage regulation. The number of them organized in trade unions is smaller, about 43 per cent in 1955; men were more strongly organized than women, the comparative proportions were 54 and 23 per cent.

conciliation and arbitration, has led to a decline in the severity of industrial conflict. The annual average of working days lost through industrial disputes between 1910 and 1925 was 18 millions; in 1926, the year of the General Strike, it reached 162 millions; between 1927 and 1939 it had fallen to 3 millions; and from 1940 to 1955 it was 2 millions. There were only two years in the period 1910–1925 when the figure did not exceed 5 millions, while in the whole of the period 1927–1955 there were no more than three years (during the Great Depression 1929 to 1932) when it did. An international comparison of working days lost per thousand persons employed in mining, manufacturing, construction and transport for the years 1947 to 1954 shows Britain well down the list with a figure of 151. Some Western European countries had a lower record, but the comparable figures for the United States, France and Australia were, for example, 1,520, 1,244 and 941.¹

Although the size and the length of strikes has been reduced since 1926, their numbers have increased considerably from about 1937 onwards. The annual average of the number of strikes in the period 1937–1955 was 1,617, as compared with 659 in 1910–1936. Very many of these strikes during the later period have been “unofficial”, i.e., not sanctioned or recognized officially by union headquarters. We do not know exactly how many. Only on one occasion has a Minister of Labour ventured any information on the proportion. That was in 1937, when he told the House of Commons that over half the strikes of the previous year (and possibly a much higher proportion) were unofficial; less than a quarter were known to be officially supported.² As most unions are parties to conciliation agreements which bind them not to resort to aggressive action in local disputes until an agreed procedure for their settlement has been fully exhausted, it is not surprising that spontaneous stoppages, usually confined to one establishment, are not given their official support.

It is often asked why workers should continue to stop work to remedy a grievance instead of allowing it to be dealt with

¹See *International Labour Review*, July 1955, and *The Times*, September 12th, 1955.

²*Hansard*, July 1st, 1937.

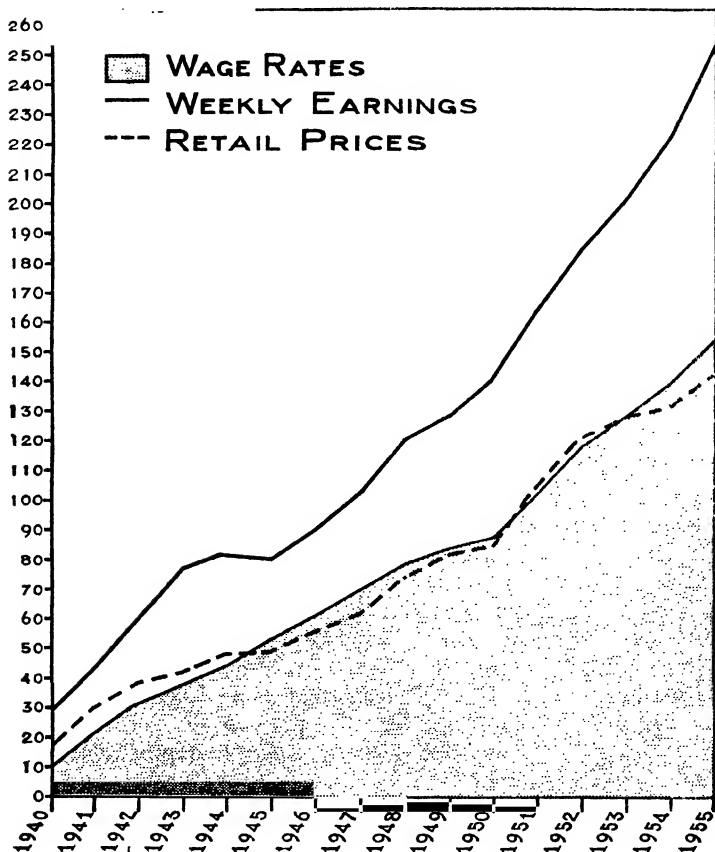
under the agreed procedure. A number of *possible* explanations can be advanced. Sometimes the procedure itself may be at fault; it is too lengthy or the outcome is too uncertain. In other cases, although the procedure is accepted as satisfactory, the dispute may arise on an issue which has not been the subject of any explicit agreement; as the workers' rights are not properly defined they prefer to rely on their own strength to safeguard their interests. Alternatively, there may be a lack of contact or confidence between the workers and their union officials, and, rightly or wrongly, the strikers believe that they are providing a healthy corrective to bureaucratic lethargy or indifference. It can also be argued that certain conditions of work or attitudes of management force the workers occasionally to find some aggressive outlet for their accumulated frustrations. 'There are, indeed, many different reasons for unofficial strikes. 'The one thing which can be said with certainty is that they cannot be traced to a single significant cause.

Wage Movements and Wage Policy

One of the main concerns of the trade unions in their separate bargaining activities has been to raise, or, in times of depression to maintain the money wages of their members. During the inter-war years, when there was chronic unemployment, wage rates were relatively stable after the general collapse of prices and wages from 1920 to 1922. In the years of the Great Depression 1929 to 1933 the Bowley index for average weekly wage rates showed a fall of some five per cent, which was wiped out by 1937. Over fifteen year period, 1924 to 1939, the total increase was no more than five per cent.

After the outbreak of war in 1939 unemployment was rapidly reduced and, from 1941 onwards, a condition of full employment has been maintained. 'The general effect on wage bargaining can be seen in the diagram on the following page. Wage rates have risen continually; by 1945 they were 51 per cent, and by 1955 they were 154 per cent above the 1938 level. At the same time retail prices, which reflect the wage earners' cost of living, have gone up nearly as much; 48 per cent by 1945 and 142 per cent by 1955. Average weekly earnings, however, have increased far more rapidly than nationally negotiated wage

*Percentage Increase on 1938 of Wage Rates,
Weekly Earnings and Retail Prices, 1940-1955*



For weekly wage rates and retail prices see *Times Review of Industry* (London and Cambridge Bulletin), March 1956, and for average weekly earnings see *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, March 1956 and October 1948. Unlike the rates index, which is based on a constant pattern of employment, the earnings index is affected by shifts in the employment distribution of wage earners according to age, sex, occupation and industry. After 1945 this difference has only slightly affected the widening of the margin between rates and earnings.

rates, apart from the years 1943 to 1945 when they remained relatively stable. Compared again with 1938, they had risen 80 per cent by 1945 and 251 per cent by 1955. Measured, then, in real terms (i.e., by what money could buy) there has been no more than a slight improvement over the whole period in the rates of pay fixed by national agreements, but the average weekly pay packet in 1955 was worth about 45 per cent more than in 1938. This comparison takes no account of the increased deductions for income tax and national insurance, but it also ignores the effect of extended social services in enlarging what has been called the "social wage".

The explanation usually given for the constant upward movement of wages and prices under full employment is very familiar by now. The bargaining power of the trade unions—and of individual workers—is greatly enhanced, while the resistance of employers to wage increases is diminished because they are more able to pass on added wage costs through higher prices without suffering any reduction in their sales. As price increases become the occasion for new wage claims, which when satisfied result in further price increases, full employment is said to be responsible for an inflationary wage-price spiral.

In fact this is not the whole of the story, or, to say the least, it is a grossly over-simplified version. Wage increases have not been the only reason for price increases. Excessive demand has inflated profits, along with prices, without their being reduced by subsequent wage increases. Retail prices depend, too, on what we have to pay as a nation for our imports and are further affected by changes in indirect taxation and subsidies. On the other hand, wage claims have not been based or conceded only on grounds of compensating for a higher cost of living. Competition among trade unions over wage differentials, either to alter or to maintain them, has helped to force the pace of the general wage movement. So has competition among employers for labour which has led them to bidding up earnings above the agreed rates.

Whatever the reasons for the constant decline in the value of money in the era of full employment—and they call for a more detailed and systematic analysis than can be given here—it has

confronted governments with a new problem in the field of wage determination. For more than half a century their policy has been "to encourage, assist, supplement and, if necessary, compel collective bargaining, but always to avoid the responsibility of directly settling the value of any kind of labour by Act of Parliament or departmental action".¹ If there was a definable public interest in the outcome of negotiations, the assumption was made that any attempt to enforce, or even to state, it would do more harm than good. The second world war brought no appreciable change in this traditional attitude. The Coalition Government, strongly influenced in this matter by Mr. Bevin as Minister of Labour, avoided any policy involving direct control of wages.² It relied instead on the introduction of compulsory arbitration, the pegging of an old and very imperfect cost-of-living index by rationing, food subsidies and price control, and on the good sense and moderation of the unions. In June 1941 it issued a White Paper on *Price Stabilization and Industrial Policy* (Cmd. 6294) which emphasized the need for minimizing wage increases, but only after saving clauses had been introduced on the insistence of the T.U.C. General Council so that it would not appear to be a plea for a "wage freeze". Wages, as we have seen, continued to rise, but not at a pace which seriously threatened the stability of the war economy.

By the latter half of 1947 the wartime policy appeared to be breaking down. A new interim index of retail prices adopted in June of that year provided a truer reflection of changes in the wage-earners' cost of living. Wage increases which were considered essential in the undermanned industries—and had been encouraged by the government—were stimulating fresh claims elsewhere. Trade unions were inclined to take the view that restraint was no longer necessary now the war was over; and many employers were willing to raise wages in order to hold or attract labour. This was the situation which led the Labour

¹Henry Clay: *The Problem of Industrial Relations*, 1929, p. 187.

²"Freedom of opportunity to make claims and to have them discussed, said Mr. Bevin, was essential to industrial peace; it would, moreover, be a dangerous thing if the Government made the independence of statutory wage-fixing and arbitration bodies suspect by offering them 'guidance'." W. K. Hancock and M. M. Gowing: *British War Economy, History of Second World War*, 1949, p. 338.

Government to publish its *Statement on Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices* (Cmd. 7321) in February, 1948. It came as a complete surprise to the unions, and the T.U.C. immediately lodged a protest with the Prime Minister "against this departure from the established practice of prior consultation."¹

The White Paper was a declaration of policy couched in the most general terms. While stating that "there was no justification at the present time for any rise in incomes from profits, rent or other like sources" and recognizing that there might "well be cases in which increases in wages and salaries would be justified from a national point of view", it declared that "each claim for an increase . . . must be considered on its national merits, not on the basis of maintaining a former relativity between different occupations and industries". Only the case of the undermanned industries was mentioned as an illustration.

The T.U.C. General Council called a conference of trade union executives to consider the White Paper and by a substantial majority the conference agreed that:

" . . . the principles of the White Paper relating to wage movements are acceptable to the Trade Union Movement to the extent that they:

- (a) recognize the necessity of retaining unimpaired the system of collective bargaining and free negotiation;
- (b) admit the justification for claims for increased wages where those claims are based upon the fact of increased output;
- (c) admit the necessity of adjusting the wages of workers whose incomes are below a reasonable standard of subsistence;
- (d) affirm that it is in the national interest to establish standards of wages and conditions in undermanned essential industries in order to attract sufficient manpower; and
- (e) recognize the need to safeguard those wage differentials which are an essential element in the wages structure of many important industries, and are required to sustain those standards of craftsmanship, training and experience that contribute directly to industrial efficiency and higher productivity."²

The Government gave no indication of what it thought of this interpretation of its policy. Taken severally, and without further

¹Trades Union Congress: *A Policy for Real Wages*, 1948, p. 11.

²*Ibid*, p. 13.

definition, it was obvious that the last four clauses would provide grounds enough for most trade unions to argue that the satisfaction of their wage claim was in the national interest.

The T.U.C. had insisted on two other conditions in accepting the White Paper, that the employers should limit their dividends and the Government should pursue a policy not only to stabilize but to reduce prices and profits. With these assurances the trade union movement, though pledged only to restrict wage claims to those which were compatible with the terms of its own declaration, in practice went a good deal farther. The attempt was made—and for a time successfully—to hold back as far as possible all wage claims on the grounds of the country's difficult economic situation. The index of full-time weekly wage rates which had risen by six points in the year preceding June, 1948, gained but another four during the following two years. The total amount secured in weekly wage increases in 1949 was the lowest of all the post-war years and half the average for the previous three years.¹

The Government proposed no sanctions for the enforcement of its policy other than the threat to use its powers for controlling prices to prevent the passing on to the consumer of any increased wage costs which could not be justified by the principles of the White Paper. This served to stiffen the employers' resistance to wage increases but the burden of restraint fell largely upon the trade unions, or more exactly upon their leadership. The tentative approach to defining the terms of a national wages policy was not followed up. From time to time there were references by Government spokesmen and trade union leaders to the justification of wage increases for lower-paid workers but even this one objective remained undefined.

The policy of voluntary restraint, buttressed by the continued voluntary acceptance of compulsory arbitration on the part of the trade unions, was already breaking down under the inevitable, internal union pressures when the pound was devalued in September 1949. Devaluation administered a shock to the trade union movement with the result that the T.U.C. General Council after long deliberations produced a recommendation in favour of what amounted to a wages standstill

until the end of 1950, providing the index of retail prices remained within the upper and lower limits of 118 and 106. A further conference of trade union executives called to consider this recommendation in January 1950 approved it by so narrow a majority, however, that it could not be put into operation. By June the General Council had had their second thoughts and sent out a statement to affiliated unions recognizing "that there must be greater flexibility of wage movements in the future" but stating that they were "firmly convinced that there is no formula which can be devised as to how this flexibility should operate". Three months later Congress met and decided by a small majority (3,898,000 to 3,521,000 votes) to refer back the section of General Council's report containing this modified advocacy of restraint.

While it lasted, one of the consequences of the unions' self restraint, which throws light on the difficulties inherent in such an experiment, was the encouragement it gave to wage increases outside the terms of national agreements. The White Paper had said "that there should be the strictest adherence to the terms of collective agreements" for one of their main advantages was "to ensure that wage and salary movements take place in an orderly manner with due regard to the general as distinct from the individual interest." Little attention was paid to this injunction. The margin between rates and earnings widened more at this time than in any other period since the war. In part this was due to an increase in systematic overtime. But payments above the rate were common; in the printing trades, for example, they took the form of "merit money", which became so universal as to lose its original purpose. Production bonuses and other increases in payment by results¹ were also introduced (particularly in the engineering industry) as "veiled" wage increases to attract labour.

Many factors, not least a growing confusion as to what it implied, contributed to the breakdown of the policy of restraint. Whatever significance may be attributed to each of them, we can now see in retrospect that it could hardly have survived the

¹The percentage of wage earners on payment by results rose from 28 to 32 between October 1947 and October 1951, since when it has remained stable.

sharp rise in prices which started in 1950. Devaluation had caused the sterling prices of imports to rise, but this was strongly reinforced by the increase in the world market prices for raw materials brought about by the Korean War; Britain's import prices rose by 40 per cent between 1949 and 1952. Mr. Gaitskell's speech, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the 1951 Trades Union Congress made it clear that the Labour Government had not abandoned hope of trying to revive the experiment,¹ but a month later it was out of office.

The new Conservative Government had different ideas on the policies which should be pursued to curb inflation. More use was to be made of monetary policy, while subsidies were to be reduced and controls removed. All the same it was not long before it had taken up the problem of wage policy. Mr. Butler, the new Chancellor, presented a statement to a specially convened meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council to the Minister of Labour in May 1952, in which he suggested that they should appoint a committee to examine "the possibility of devising methods of relating wages more closely to productivity and of modifying the existing wage structures of many of our industries with this end in view". The proposal was accepted by the British Employers' Confederation and the representatives of the nationalized industries, but rejected by the T.U.C.

Having failed in a frontal attack on the problem the Government adopted more devious methods. The first action of this kind was a decision by the Minister of Labour to refer back for reconsideration, in the light of the Chancellor's statement, the proposals for wage increases made by a dozen Wages Councils. A storm of protest followed. All the Councils re-submitted their proposals unamended and by September the Minister had issued Orders to give effect to them. It was next noticeable that a number of important wage claims were being wholly rejected by arbitration tribunals. This coincided with a stiffening of the employers' resistance in negotiations, so that more claims were being referred to arbitration. During 1953 the awards of the Industrial Disputes Tribunal on wage claims were

¹A temporary legal limit of dividends was proposed and stronger price controls. The Government also indicated its willingness to consider some increase in subsidies if this would help to stabilize wages.

so similar in character and so small in amount (running at about four shillings a week) that trade unionists accused it of following a wages policy. The effect of the new restraint applied by employers and arbitration tribunals can be seen in the table at the bottom of the page, both in the low total of wage increases in 1953 and, still more, in the unprecedentedly low proportion resulting from voluntary negotiation.

The repeal of Order 1305 in August 1951 had removed the previous restrictions on the right to strike. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, which failed altogether to secure a wage increase in 1953, called a one-day token strike in December to enforce their claim. This yielded no immediate results, but the National Union of Railwaymen, having rejected a four shilling award by the railways arbitration tribunal, went

*Amounts and Methods of Settlement of Wage Increases,
1945-1955*

Year	Total Amount Secured in Weekly Wage Increases, in £ Millions	Number of Workers Affected, in Millions*	Percentage Attributed to			
			Voluntary negotiations	Sliding scales	Statutory bodies	Arbitration and mediation
1945†	1.8	7.3	59	3	10	28
1946†	2.9	8.0	85	1	10	4
1947†	1.7	5.0	56	1	30	13
1948	1.9	7.8	82	6	9	3
1949	1.1	5.2	43	11	33	13
1950	2.0	7.4	65	8	19	8
1951	6.6	12.3	72	6	17	5
1952	4.5	11.5	53	15	19	13
1953	2.4	9.0	25	19	36	20
1954	3.5	10.1	72	8	8	12
1955	5.1	11.9	74	6	15	5

*Of about 17 million wage earners, roughly 13 million are employed under collective agreements (with 2 million covered by sliding-scale agreements) and another 4 million under statutory regulations.

†Particulars relating to employees in government establishments and to shop assistants were first introduced in 1948, so that 1945 to 1947 are not strictly comparable with subsequent years.

Compiled from January issues of the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*.

further and threatened a Christmas strike. After government intervention, the conflict was averted by the British Transport Commission's conceding increases ranging upwards from seven shillings a week, which became the pattern for the settlement of outstanding claims in other industries, including engineering.

The Courts of Inquiry set up to deal with the wage disputes in the engineering and shipbuilding industries brought out their reports in February, 1954. Apart from fulfilling their usual task of making recommendations for a settlement of the disputes, they declared their concern about "the wider problems affecting the national economy" raised by the wage claims and proposed that an "authoritative and impartial body" should be appointed to consider the problems and "give advice and guidance as to broad policy and possible action".¹ No one knew quite what this meant, but the Government took up the proposal with the National Joint Advisory Council, only to find that the T.U.C. would not agree to it "in any form". "The General Council were unanimously of the opinion that whatever needed to be said to the Trade Union Movement on the present economic situation could most appropriately be said by themselves."²

Another proposal was also put forward in February of that year. Sir Godfrey Ince, then Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, suggested in a public address that the negotiating machinery in all industries should make provision for the use of arbitration as the final step in the settlement of disputes. In view of the unions' recent experience with arbitration the proposal could hardly have come at a less appropriate time. Although taken up by the Government it met with a similar fate to the proposal of the Courts of Inquiry.

Nothing having come of these various moves to influence wages, rates began to forge ahead of prices after 1952 and the margin between rates and earnings also widened again. The movement of wages seemed to have acquired a momentum of its own which was not appreciably diminished by the fact that

¹Cmd. 9084. The significance of wage settlements in the engineering and allied industries (including shipbuilding) can be gauged from the fact that nearly four million workers are likely to be affected by them; in the period 1949-55 these industries accounted for 21 per cent of the total increase in weekly rates of wage recorded by the Ministry of Labour.

²*Trades Union Congress Report 1954*, p. 239.

the cost of living no longer continued to rise as rapidly as between 1950 and 1952. Another feature of wage movements in this period was the increasing preference for percentage over flat rate increases. The previously well-established trend towards a narrowing of the percentage skill differential was checked. Disputes and stoppages over wage differentials became more frequent and, generally, the use of the strike, or the threat of it, in collective bargaining was more in evidence than it had been for many years.

Only a brief reference can be made to the next, and most important, attempt of the Conservative Government to check the upward movement of wages.¹ In May 1956, its policy for establishing a "price plateau" began to take shape. By then a number of substantial wage claims had been voiced in preparation for the next annual round of increases. To meet this situation the Government secured assurances from the nationalized industries and the central organizations of private employers that they would not increase their prices. The implication was plain. They were agreeing, in effect, to stand firm and resist any general wage demands which would threaten price stability. Wage restraint was to be imposed by the employers at a calculated risk of endangering industrial peace. True, the Government also sought the co-operation of the trade unions for its policy, but the Trades Union Congress held in September left no doubt that it would not be forthcoming.

The main outcome of the "price plateau" policy was the shipbuilding and engineering strikes of March-April 1957, which cost the nation about six million working days. The shipbuilding and engineering employers, following the Government's lead, had refused to concede any wage increase in negotiations, with the result that the unions turned to strike action to enforce their demands. Once the strikes had started, however, the Government was soon engaged in persuading the employers to make a large enough concession to bring them to an end. Moreover, the British Transport Commission, which could hardly have acted without some form of government approval, conceded a five per cent wage increase during the first week of the

¹A full account is given by H. A. Clegg and Rex Adams in *The Employers' Challenge*, 1957.

shipbuilding strike before any of the engineers had stopped work. This subsequently became the pattern for wage settlements in other industries. In shipbuilding and engineering, on the basis of the recommendations of the Courts of Inquiry, the alternative of 6½ per cent was offered and accepted on conditions which included the unions' agreement not to advance general pay claims over the next twelve months. The annual round of wage increases, far from having been avoided, was as great as in any previous year.

The failure of the Conservative Government's wage policies can be traced, in the first instance, to union opposition. The grounds of that opposition are considered in the final chapter, but the preceding narrative clearly shows that no government can pursue a wage policy without the consent and support of the representative organizations on both sides of industry. To secure that co-operation, especially from the trade unions, wages cannot be dealt with in isolation from other personal incomes; the unions must be convinced that other sections of the community are not profiting from the wage-earners' restraint. Wages are by no means the only factor responsible for inflation, so that there is little prospect of success unless economic planning is treated as an integrated whole and the government's policy is consistently directed in all its aspects towards reducing inflationary pressures.

The particular dilemma with which full employment has confronted the trade unions is whether wages can be excluded from the realms of government planning. Their members have every reason to dislike the insecurities of an inadequately planned economy, whether these take the form of constantly rising prices or widespread unemployment. On the other hand, the direct control of wages by the government would deprive the unions of their most cherished function. But this dilemma can be exaggerated. In a free society the main instrument for regulating wages can only be the collective agreement. What has to be decided is how this instrument can be made to serve the broad ends of planning.

From this point of view the first and most obvious requirement is that collective agreements should regulate the individual wage bargain more effectively than they do at present.

The widening of the margin between earnings and rates represents a weakening in the collective regulation of wages; it is a "wage drift", to use the new term which aptly describes what has been happening. The drift can only be countered by a reform of wage structures and the strict observation of rates established for each grade of employees within the structure. The other need is for new wage agreements to be concluded with some regard for the limits set by increases in the national output. The general movement of wages already follows the pattern determined by a few key bargains. Is it inconceivable that the amount of the annual round of wage increases should be negotiated between the government and central bodies on both sides of industry? Bargaining would not be avoided, for a conflict of interests over the distribution of incomes would remain. But sectional competition among unions and employers would be reduced, and the outcome of such a central bargain expressed in a master agreement, would give more weight to the common interest in avoiding inflation. Collective bargaining is not, as is sometimes suggested, incompatible with full employment. What may prove incompatible is bargaining conducted on the old assumptions which matured against a background of chronic unemployment.

CHAPTER VI

INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Demand for Workers' Control

The Webbs concluded their *Industrial Democracy* with the observation that "the very fact that, in modern society, the individual necessarily loses control over his own life, makes him desire to regain collectively what has become individually impossible". Unfortunately it seems also to be true that modern society tends to destroy the individual's confidence in his capacity to control his own life and thus to weaken the feeling of personal responsibility for his social environment. However, the growth of trade unionism has undoubtedly contributed to the awakening among wage-earners of an awareness of their own dignity and importance, and this has found expression in demands to more than a larger pay-packet and greater leisure. There is a long tradition among British trade unions in favour of the workers having some share in the management and control of the industries in which they are employed, as well as in the determination of their wages and working conditions.

Although theoretical syndicalism, of the type that once flourished in France, was too rigid a doctrine to gain a hold in this country, the idea of "workers' control" had found many supporters among the militant trade unionists by the advent of the First World War. In 1912 the South Wales miners published *The Miners' Next Step*, which propagated the view that mines should be run by the miners. In the unofficial shop stewards' movement, which became a powerful force in the main industrial centres during the war, the same ideas were current. Only in the intellectual world did this wave of syndicalism find a theoretical expression in that peculiarly British product, Guild Socialism, which reached the zenith of its influence at this time.

Apart from the failure of the experimental Guilds which were set up by trade unionists mainly in the building industry, two events in the post-war years struck mortal blows at the

syndicalist approach, the collapse of the Triple Alliance in 1921 and the General Strike of 1926. Neither invalidated its principles, but syndicalists had preached the gospel of "direct action" for the achievement of their ends and, so far as most industrial workers were concerned, it had failed the pragmatic test.

In the following years, under the leadership of Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin, the trade union movement adopted a new approach to the control of industry. Industrial peace and collaboration with the employers were gradually accepted as desirable. Accordingly the unions were urged to declare that the efficiency and prosperity of industry were their immediate concern and on this basis of responsible partnership to stake their claim for a greater say in management. The demand for "workers' control" had not been entirely abandoned but was now being pressed in a context different from the one in which it had been conceived. No longer linked with the doctrine of class warfare, it had been placed on a more realistic footing by the unions' acceptance of responsibilities within the existing economic order.

It was not until 1932 that the Trades Union Congress, which had steadily been strengthening its moral authority, attempted for the first time to state on behalf of the whole of the trade union movement, the kind of industrial reorganization it should seek to bring about. The proposals coincided with those which in the Labour Party had found their strong advocate in Herbert Morrison, whose *Socialisation and Transport* was published in 1933. The Public Corporation was the chosen form for those industries considered "ripe for socialisation". The T.U.C. General Council's Report in dealing with the composition of the Boards which were to administer publicly owned industries specifically stated:

"Members of such a Board should in all cases be appointed by the Government, and should consist neither of technical experts nor of representatives of particular interests, but of persons appointed solely for their ability to fill the position."

This point led to lively debates at both the Trades Union

Congresses and the Labour Party Conferences in the next few years. The critics—and they included Ernest Bevin and Charles Dukes, the leaders of the two powerful general workers' unions—maintained that this did not meet the unions' claim to a measure of direct participation in management. The General Council withdrew their report for further examination and proceeded, jointly with the National Executive of the Labour Party, to draft a statement which recognized the claim of the unions to *nominate* persons for appointment to the Public Boards. This was given general approval by the annual conferences of both bodies in 1933, although the Labour Party Conference also carried a resolution declaring that the unions should have a *statutory right* to a fifty per cent representation on the boards of nationalized industries.

This particular conflict was not wholly resolved for another decade. In 1943 the Trades Union Congress instructed the General Council to prepare a comprehensive *Report on Post-War Reconstruction*. Next year the report was issued and accepted unanimously by Congress. It recommended that where industries were nationalized the governing boards should include members with a wide experience in the trade union movement, but that these members "should surrender any position held in, or any formal responsibility to the trade unions". Two reasons were advanced for the recommendation: (1) that the trade unions must retain their complete independence—their right to bargain and criticize—and this would be endangered if they were previously compromised by the participation of their representatives in the Boards' decisions; and (2) that control over the policy and direction of a public industry must be exercised ultimately by Parliament as representative of the whole community, and immediately by individuals unfettered by any other considerations than those of the public interest. At the same time the views of the trade unions on the administration and management of the industries should be taken into account by the formation of consultative councils at all levels of organization, on which they should be directly represented.

After the 1945 election victory of the Labour Party, when the first nationalization Bills were being introduced in Parlia-

ment, no substantial points of difference arose between the Labour Government and the trade union movement. In fact the proposed legislation closely followed the T.U.C.'s own proposals. The first industry to be nationalized was coal-mining. Two members of the original National Coal Board, appointed by the Government, were trade unionists, and in the Act a statutory obligation was laid upon the Board to establish and maintain joint machinery for consultation with the unions on (1) questions relating to safety, health and welfare; and (2) the organization and conduct of operations on which coal-miners are employed and any other matters of mutual interest. The National Union of Mineworkers were wholly satisfied with this type of organization, as indeed they are today.

Dissatisfaction with the organization of the nationalized industries was first voiced in 1948 both at the Labour Party Conference and at the Trades Union Congress. At the former conference a resolution asking for "workers' participation through their trade unions in the direction and management of nationalized industries at all levels" was supported by three large unions, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Union of Post Office Workers, and the National Union of Railwaymen. The resolution was opposed by the National Union of Mineworkers and the Transport and General Workers' Union, and was withdrawn on the understanding that the Labour Party and the T.U.C. would have joint discussions on the subject. At the Trades Union Congress a compromise resolution was accepted which expressed "concern" at the composition of the Boards of the nationalized industries and demanded in effect the inclusion of more trade unionists on them.

Obviously the idea of "workers' control" was far from dead. This was strikingly illustrated at the 1949 biennial conference of the Transport and General Workers' Union, where a resolution was carried by 433 votes to 170, despite the opposition of the General Executive Council, "that trade union representatives should be placed on these boards and executives (*i.e. those in the nationalized industries*) with the right of the members to recall such trade union representatives as and when considered necessary". The same conference carried another resolution by 426 votes to 208 to exclude any member of the Communist

Party from holding office in the union. The demand for direct representation is voiced by the communists for their own purposes, and in some cases—the Electrical Trades Union, for example—the insistence upon workers' control might be explained as a result of their influence. A comparison of the two votes at the Transport and General Workers' Conference, however, showed that there is still a large body of vocal trade union opinion in favour of a change in the present method of appointment to the Public Boards, which is not the product of communist agitation.

At the 1949 Congress the T.U.C. General Council reported the results of their promised investigation into the structure and conduct of the nationalized industries. Apart from repeating the suggestion that a higher proportion of the Boards' members should be drawn from the trade union movement, their report was mainly concerned with advocating improvements in the actual working of the consultative machinery. It emphasized that, as far as possible, consultation should always take place *before* policy decisions had been reached by management, that trade unions and management should sponsor training in the methods and purposes of joint consultation on an extensive scale, and that more attention should be paid to improving the procedures for promotion within the nationalized industries. At Congress itself there was little debate on the subject and the General Council have subsequently remained unchallenged in their continued rejection of direct representation.

Developments in Consultation

Whatever may be the state of trade union opinion today on the old demand for "workers' control", in practice the trade unions have extended their influence in industry, beyond that which they exert through collective bargaining, mainly by insisting that they should be *consulted* about matters previously decided without their participation or consent. Arrangements for consultation, involving the trade unions have been developed at different levels of organization, for different purposes and with different degrees of success. A term like "industrial democracy" may be used to cover them all, but it is important

to draw some distinctions. Broadly these arrangements *fall into* three distinct, though inter-related categories:

- (1) those constituted to assist government departments or government agencies;
- (2) those which exist between the trade unions and the employers, private or public, in the various industries and services; and
- (3) the provisions for joint consultation between management and workers in individual establishments.

The third category is sometimes taken to be a part of the second, but there are good reasons for considering them separately.

The participation of the trade unions in the formulation and execution of government policy has been dealt with in Chapter IV.¹ This takes place at national, regional and local levels, but because of the way in which the trade unions are organized their influence here is greatest at the national level. This kind of consultation developed mainly during the Second World War and is a consequence of the growth of economic planning and the "Welfare State".

The idea of the trade unions and employers engaging in joint consultation as well as collective bargaining was first advanced officially by the Whitley Committee, with its recommendation in favour of Joint Industrial Councils. That these bodies, where they were formed, mainly served to extend the provisions for collective bargaining has already been pointed out,² but the original intention was to get away from the "cash basis" of industrial relations by providing a single joint body in which employers and trade unions would deal with all matters of mutual concern with a common objective in mind, the efficiency and prosperity of the industry. This rather naive conception was challenged at the time by the five socialist members of the committee in their proviso to the general report. They stated that:

"... while recognizing that the more amicable relations thus established between capital and labour will afford an atmosphere favourable to industrial peace and progress, we desire to express

¹See p. 63

²See p. 88

our view that a complete identity of interests between capital and labour cannot be thus effected, and that such machinery cannot be expected to furnish a settlement for the more serious conflicts of interest involved in the working of an economic system primarily governed and directed by motives of private profits."

The experience in the inter-war years appeared to confirm this sceptical view. Significantly enough it was in the Civil Service, with its security of employment and absence of the profit motive, that "Whitleyism" found its main application. Even here it gained but partial acceptance after many set-backs. Mr. A. J. T. Day, the Chairman of the Staff Side of the Civil Service National Whitley Council, has given an interesting account of the way in which a change in attitude was brought about on both sides.¹ "The machine took a long time to run in," he writes, "and it used to creak and groan to such an extent that one sometimes wondered how business could get done at all. . . . It is very possible that if the agendas, minutes, committee reports and so on of the National Whitley Council were searched for, say, ten of the inter-war years, after the golden age of 1919-21, it would be found that of all the items dealt with the Official Side provided scarcely one." The Staff Side were left to make the running and quite naturally they used it largely as grievance machinery; between "each of the two sides as a whole there was a good deal of suspicion and sometimes positively bad feeling". Mr. Day admits that he is not sure how the change came about, but states as a fact that:

"... just as the Official Side have shown themselves increasingly willing to take the initiative in Whitley discussions on conditions of service (I use the phrase in its widest meaning), so the Staff Side have been more and more ready to devote time and thought to questions affecting the efficiency of the Service rather than the self-interest of their constituents—problems of manpower, training, recruitment, devolution and so on. More than one joint committee at the national level in recent times has in consequence been more in the nature of a working party than a coming to-

¹See "Twenty-five Years of Whitleyism", *Whitley Bulletin*, February 1950.

gether of two contending sides. Thus the dual purpose for which Whitleyism was instituted is being increasingly fulfilled with advantage to administration and staff alike."

In privately owned industry collaboration between trade unions and employers is not without its social dangers. As far as it is concerned with raising productivity or bringing about more harmonious industrial relations it is all to the good, but it can serve other purposes as well. A common interest may develop between the trade unions and the employers in raising prices or in discouraging innovations which would disturb established interests. This has been one of the reasons advanced for including independent members in joint bodies for improving industrial organization.

The T.U.C.'s 1944 *Report on Post-War Reconstruction* recommended the setting up of Industrial Boards in privately owned industries "composed of representatives of workpeople and employers in equal proportion and an impartial chairman and other independent members appointed and paid by the Government". Their main purpose, the report suggested, would be "to interpret the industry's requirements to the Government and to apply the Government's requirements to the industry". The Industrial Organization and Development Act, 1947, was an attempt to do something on these lines. It empowered the President of the Board of Trade to form Development Councils and to assign to them any of twenty functions, where he was satisfied that such a Council was needed in a particular industry and a substantial number of those engaged in it desired to see one established.

Although statutory bodies appointed by the Government, the Development Councils were not intended to be instruments of government control, but rather to act as a forum and a clearing-house for ideas within the industry itself. Their compulsory powers were limited to raising funds by means of levy, to requiring firms to supply certain information, and to maintaining a register of persons carrying on business in the industry. They had not the right to refuse registration or impose conditions on new entrants. Under the Labour Government four Councils were set up, in Cotton (where there already existed the wartime

Cotton Board with similar powers), Jewellery and Silverware, Furniture and Clothing. Three other Orders were issued under the Act providing for compulsory levies to finance research in Lace and Wool and export promotion in Wool. In 1952 the Conservative Government decided to wind up the Councils in Jewellery and Clothing, the latter being replaced by a voluntary body without independent members. Strong opposition by employers' associations has been the main factor hampering a fuller use of the Act.

In the case of those industries which have been nationalized since 1945 the legislation placing them under public ownership imposed an obligation on the management to arrange by agreement with the appropriate unions for joint consultation on such matters as safety, health, welfare and education and generally on other matters of mutual interest, including efficiency. The arrangements adopted have not followed anything like a standard pattern. Some of them have preferred the Whitley model, others have devised two separate procedures for negotiation and consultation at all levels in their organization. It is not possible here to explain these various arrangements or to evaluate them.¹ The nationalized industry which seems to have paid most attention to joint consultation is electricity supply. A brief description of its machinery will illustrate the approach it has adopted.

In electricity supply there existed a Joint Industrial Council prior to the industry being nationalized. Its national and regional councils have been retained for negotiating with the manual workers' unions; and works committees have been set up, where they did not already exist, for dealing with grievances. In addition separate negotiating procedures have been agreed with the unions concerned for clerical and administrative workers, for the technical engineering staff and for the managerial grades. Representatives of all the trade unions catering for these various groups of workers are brought together on the National Joint Advisory Council and the District Advisory Councils where they meet the appointed representatives of the Electricity Boards for consultation.

¹For a critical study see H. A. Clegg: *Industrial Democracy and Nationalization*, 1951.

The Local Advisory Committees at the establishment level vary in construction. Usually they are composed of the members of the Works Committee plus elected representatives of the non-manual workers and the representatives appointed by the Board. Where large numbers of clerical and administrative workers are congregated, however, their Staff Committee forms the nucleus and elected representatives of other employees are added. All workers' representatives on the Works, Staff and Local Advisory Committees have to be members of one of the unions party to the agreements, but any person employed within the sphere of a Local Advisory Committee is entitled to submit items for inclusion on its agenda.

In 1957 an important change was made in the constitution of this advisory machinery. The Local Advisory Committees now elect their own representatives on to the district and national Councils in addition to the members appointed by the trade unions. The change "was inspired by the belief that these representatives will bring valuable experience and enthusiasm to the work" of the Councils and link them "more closely to the L.A.C.s and through them to employees generally".¹

The development of the practice of joint consultation in individual establishments or their equivalent, i.e. in factories, collieries, stations, depots or offices, merits separate consideration, because it has its own special significance. It is here that production takes place and relationships are formed among all the different groups of workers, by hand and brain, who co-operate together for the successful running of the enterprise. Joint consultation in the individual establishment is essentially a method of management, indeed it has been aptly defined as "management by consent". Of course, the trade unions are involved. Its practice is usually regulated or affected by collective agreements and by the decisions taken by trade unions and employers at higher levels of organization, but those agreements and decisions alone cannot make it a reality.

The least successful of the recommendations of the Whitley Committee was the one advocating the formation of Works Committees, representative of the management and workpeople

¹Lord Citrine in *The Seventh Annual Report, 1955-6*, National Joint Advisory Council of the Electricity Supply Industry, p. 10.

TRADE UNIONS

in individual establishments. Not all of them failed, but generally they were regarded with hostility both by employers and by trade unions, the former fearing that they would tend to restrict their managerial rights and the latter that they would either become a substitute for trade unionism or else come into conflict with official trade union policy. Some large concerns, such as Rowntrees, Imperial Chemical Industries and Courtaulds, made a persistent effort to encourage their employees to take an interest in matters other than wages, with a moderate degree of success. But discussions on Whitley Works Committees or Councils, where they existed during the inter-war years, were largely confined to welfare matters (ventilation, sanitary arrangements, social activities, etc.) and usually took place in an atmosphere of "benevolent paternalism". The trade unions took little or no interest in them, providing they did not trespass on their functions.

During the early years of the Second World War the trade unions demanded from the Government a more active production policy. This led to a new experiment in joint consultation. In 1942, national agreements were signed which provided for the setting up of Joint Production Committees both in the Royal Ordnance Factories and in privately owned engineering works. The constitution of these committees was first settled by the Ministry of Supply Joint Industrial Council and then an agreement in similar terms was reached between Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation and the manual workers' unions in the industry.

In one respect the J.P.C.s resembled the Whitley Works Committees: the agreements laid down that they should not "discuss matters which are trade questions such as wages and like subjects, or which are covered by the approved machinery for negotiation". Their functions were limited to providing for an exchange of views on matters "relating to production and increased efficiency". The new and important principle introduced by these agreements was that only trade unionists could be elected as the workers' representatives on the committees although all employees could participate in the ballot. Management appointed their representatives, who were not to exceed the number elected by the workers. The committees also had

Joint Secretaries, one from each side. By June 1944 it was said that as many as 4,565 J.P.C.s were operating in private firms in the engineering and allied industries. Not all, or even a majority of them were an unqualified success, but in some cases they made a marked contribution to increased output. Pit Production Committees were also formed in the coal-mining industry, and in shipbuilding and in building and civil engineering similar arrangements existed.¹

After the War most of these Joint Production Committees collapsed. There was no longer the same interest in co-operation for the achievement of an overriding common purpose, adequate supplies for victory. Yet the need for increased production was as great as ever. In January 1947 the Government brought up at the National Joint Advisory Council to the Minister of Labour the question of reviving the practice of joint consultation at the establishment level in privately owned industry. The Council agreed to recommend to employers' associations and trade unions, the setting up of joint consultative machinery, where it did not already exist, subject to the following qualifications:

- (a) that such machinery would be voluntary and advisory in character;
- (b) that it would not deal with questions relating to terms and conditions of employment which are normally dealt with through the ordinary machinery of joint negotiation;
- (c) that it would be left to each industry, through its ordinary negotiation arrangements, to adopt the form of machinery best suited to its own particular circumstances, and to decide, in particular, *whether such machinery could best be established at the factory level or cover a wider area*—(author's italics).

Inquiries made by the Ministry of Labour showed that by the end of 1949 in fifty-four main industries, twenty-six had agreed to recommend the establishment of joint committees in factory or workshop—thirteen of these had drawn up a model constitution for such committees—and seventeen had decided

¹The best account of these war-time developments is given in the report prepared by the International Labour Office on *Joint Production Committees in Great Britain*, 1943.

that initiative should be left to individual firms and work-people. A further eight industries were of the opinion that the existing joint machinery was adequate for dealing with matters requiring joint consultation, and the remaining three had not yet reached any conclusion.

In most large firms there is some provision for joint consultation but progress has been slow in extending the practice to the greater part of industry. It cannot be said that the employers' associations or the trade unions have put much drive into the campaign, in most cases the initiative has been left to both sides within the individual establishments. The main impetus has come from the Government. The Regional Officers of the Ministry of Labour and the Regional Boards for Industry were asked to take an active interest in the matter and help in the formation of Joint Consultative Committees where there was a desire on both sides to form them and suitable agreements existed. Slow progress on a voluntary basis has raised the question whether the practice should be made compulsory by law in all but the smallest factories, but both the employers' associations and the majority of trade unions are opposed to this course on the grounds that the necessary goodwill cannot be created by legislation.

Productivity and Management

The purposes which the trade unions follow in collective bargaining are straightforward and have never been in doubt. The same cannot be said about their attitude towards joint consultation. There is still a good deal of confusion within their ranks on the extent to which the trade unions should become involved in managerial problems and this, in turn, arises from uncertainty on the objects to be achieved. Some trade unionists look on joint consultation mainly as a stepping-stone to workers' control, as an opportunity for the workers to learn something about management to prepare them for their future responsibilities. There are others who regard any kind of co-operation with employers, even in the nationalized industries, with doubt and suspicion. In the main, however, joint consultation has been given an official blessing by the trade union movement in the post-war years on the grounds that it will help to raise

productivity. This brings us to consider what has been perhaps the most significant development in trade union policy in the last decade, the growing emphasis upon production problems.

The attitude of the trade unions to management has been changed by the existence of full employment. Whilst there was chronic unemployment they could hardly be expected to display much enthusiasm for new machinery and labour-saving improvements in industrial organization, since they often had good reason to fear that more of their members might become unemployed as a consequence. In the inter-war years the employment policies of the trade unions were either directed towards sharing out the available work among a larger number of people (a shorter working week, an increase in the school-leaving age and the introduction of retirement pensions were measures given prominence) or else tended to be sectional, with those unions in a position to maintain them relying upon "restrictive practices" to protect the employment of their own members. Full employment has helped, slowly but surely, to remove the fears responsible for negative and indifferent attitudes towards production. More than that, it has brought with it a realization among the trade union officials that if they are to maintain and improve the standard of living of their members they must do something about promoting industrial efficiency.

How far this lesson has been accepted by the main body of the active rank-and-file it is difficult to know, but leadership has not been lacking. The T.U.C. General Council called a special conference of trade union executives in November 1948 "to discuss how the level of productivity can be raised", and put forward some practical proposals which included:

- “(a) focusing attention on shortages and bottlenecks so that they may be overcome wherever possible;
- (b) organizing national or local industrial conferences to be addressed by leaders on both sides of the industry and appropriate research scientists concerned with the industry in question, together with representatives of the Production Efficiency Department of the Board of Trade;
- (c) accelerating the formation of Joint Production Committees under satisfactory conditions in the industry;

- (d) reviewing the system of shop stewards and other workplace representatives and seeking to raise their efficiency by *Training Within Industry* courses or by other means;
- (e) considering how far it is possible to take advantage of the courses provided by existing agencies for instruction in management and technical subjects;
- (f) consulting the Committee of Editors of Trade Union Journals, on the kind of material, technical or otherwise, which would be of interest and value to the readers of those journals;
- (g) dealing with the production question at Conferences of full-time Trade Union officials in each region, now held annually in the autumn."

The response to this appeal has certainly not been dramatic. Some unions have shown a greater interest than others. But one fact should not be forgotten: the trade unions have not insisted on the restoration of many of the pre-war trade practices, which they waived during the war, although they were fully entitled to do so under the 1942 Act.¹ The following quotation, expressing the views of a member of the Executive Committee of the Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers on the changes which have taken place in the steel-founding industry, is probably as characteristic as any of the forward-looking trade union attitude:

"We've got to realize (he said) that new techniques are going to break down a number of what used to be skilled jobs into easier processes, some less skilled, some requiring new kinds of skill with machines. I served my time learning a skilled trade and I can understand the feelings of a skilled man when he sees a job that he spent a long apprenticeship in learning done mechanically. We're not going to get everything done at once, but as trade unionists we'll find ways of getting our people to understand the need for new developments.

We are not going to stand in the way but we do say that we want a share in discussing and carrying out these developments. If some of them mean a smaller labour force we'll face it, but

¹The Restoration of Pre-War Trade Practices Act, 1942, placed upon employers the obligation to restore trade union practices which had been abrogated during the war period within two months of the conclusion of the emergency. The main practices concerned were those connected with the dilution of skilled labour and the demarcation of work among different classes of workpeople.

we want a say in how men are going to be displaced, and we want to do what we can to see that they are absorbed in other jobs. I think that as trade unions we are beginning to be given the kind of say we want in steel-founding. We believe that everybody will benefit, and that our share will come in higher earnings and better conditions.”¹

One expression of the trade unions' post-war interest in production was their co-operation in the work of the Anglo-American Council on Productivity², which opened up new opportunities for a useful exchange of experiences between those engaged in all kinds of industrial employment in the two countries. A particularly striking report³ was produced by the team of ten trade union officials sent to the United States by the T.U.C. to study the part played by the American trade unions “in the achieving and maintaining of the high average rate of industrial productivity” in their own country and to consider how far similar methods might be applied in Great Britain. One of the main recommendations of the team was that:

“Larger unions and federations should establish production engineering departments and train production engineers for their national or district offices to protect and further the widest interests of their members. The Trades Union Congress should have a competent technical staff to give help and guidance in the establishing of union production departments and to provide direct services to unions too small to engage their own staffs.”

In support of this recommendation it was argued:

“Where managements are progressive and seeking to use ‘scientific management’ techniques in a reasonable manner to step up production, unions should be prepared to co-operate. If managements try to be aggressive the need for effective trade union action is accentuated—not to the point of resisting new develop-

¹*Manchester Guardian*, May 18th, 1950.

²In 1952 this body was replaced by the British Productivity Council, on which the T.U.C. continues to co-operate with the central employers' organizations and representatives of the nationalized industries in arousing interest and supplying information on matters affecting productivity.

³Trades Union Congress: *Trade Unions and Productivity*, 1950.

ment but to see that abuses are eliminated and that the inaccuracies of 'scientific management' are not exploited at the expense of workpeople. Where managements are not sufficiently enterprising and progressive, are unwilling to step up efficiency or extend markets through lower prices, then unions must press them to do so."

The T.U.C. published the Report without committing itself to an acceptance of all its views and recommendations. It decided, however, to establish its own Production Department and started training courses for union officials and workshop representatives in modern management techniques, including work study.

The bearing of joint consultation on productivity is obvious enough. The opening paragraphs of the special supplement to the Ministry of Labour's *Industrial Relations Handbook on Joint Consultation in Industry*, published in 1950, express this clearly:

"The foundation of successful joint consultation is willingness on the part of management to treat their employees collectively as an intelligent and responsible force in the undertaking, able to play their part in the more efficient performance of the work, and to make their contribution to the solution of the problems of common interest which arise. Where this attitude is sincerely adopted by the management, it calls forth a corresponding spirit of interest and co-operation from the workers. . . . While practical suggestions for improvements in methods of production, or in organization, will be, in themselves, of the greatest value, the most important and permanent advantage to be gained from successful joint consultation is the improvement of relations between management and employees within the undertaking."

Improved industrial organization—whether it takes the form of rearrangement of plant, a better sub-division of jobs, well-designed wage incentive schemes, the smoother flow of raw materials, or any other application of forethought and scientific knowledge to the process of production—is likely to meet with resistance when the human relationships between management and workers are bad and mutual confidence is lacking. Changes need to be thoroughly explained and discussed before they are

introduced so that the need for them is accepted by all concerned. While in small establishments no special arrangements may be needed for this purpose, some kind of formal machinery is indispensable in firms of any size. This kind of "management by consent" has been practised by a few firms for a long time, because they believed in it. Full employment has made it a practical necessity for many more; the sanction of the sack having lost much of its power they depend to a far greater extent on voluntary co-operation and must find ways and means of securing it.

It may be asked why progress in developing joint consultation within the individual establishments has been so slow if full employment has strengthened both the employers' and the trade unions' interest in it. One reason comes immediately to mind: it requires of a large number of people, managers, supervisors, workers' representatives, to change their ways; attitudes hardened by years of experience are not easily altered, without a great deal of conscious educational effort; and then only slowly. But there are other reasons, and one of them—on the trade union side—is the prevailing idea that joint consultation is to be looked upon primarily as a method for raising productivity.

The workers' claim to be consulted by management before decisions which can appreciably affect their interests are taken, is fundamentally a moral one. It rests on its own merits regardless of the economic result: as human beings they have dignity and are entitled to respect. The worker's interests in relation to his work are manifold. He is concerned, of course, with its permanence, with how much he gets for it, with how long and how hard he has to work, that is in the terms of his employment, which today in most cases are regulated by collective agreements. He is also concerned with the way in which he is treated by those who give him instructions, whether he is treated as an inferior or as an equal with a different job. He may also be interested in the way in which his work is organized, in the kind of job he is given to do, not only from the point of view of how much it pays, but whether it makes sense, whether his time is being wasted, whether he may take some pride in the result. These are all matters where conflicts of interest can

arise between management and men, and many of these conflicts cannot possibly be settled by the terms of a general agreement. Yet they require to be regulated and a certain amount of bargaining may have to take place.

Looked at in this way joint consultation is no more than a logical extension of collective bargaining. To assume that the former is all co-operation and the latter all conflict is dangerously misleading. There are common and conflicting interests in every community, and an industrial enterprise is a community, not a number of separate individuals working on machines. In collective bargaining and in joint consultation both common and conflicting interests are involved, and influence the outcome of the deliberations. The real distinction between the two methods is that collective bargaining leads to a joint agreement between the employers and the trade unions and joint responsibility for upholding its terms, whereas the final outcome of joint consultation is a managerial decision, for which management must take full responsibility, but one which has been explained to the workers and which has taken their reactions into account.

In practice joint consultation appears to have developed most successfully at the establishment level where the close connection between the subject matter of consultation and negotiation has been recognized. One of the conclusions reached by Sir Charles Renold in his interesting and valuable study, *Joint Consultation Over Thirty Years*, a case study of his own business experience, is that:

"The field open for discussion should include things that really matter—not merely the ventilation of minor grievances about amenities. One sure way to secure this is to recognize one and the same body of workers' representatives for both negotiation and for consultation. Moreover the prestige and sense of responsibility of the workers' representatives can be greatly enhanced if—like the shop stewards described—they can be treated as the accredited agents of the trade unions and negotiations conducted through them in the first instance on matters usually handled direct with external trade union officials."¹

¹Op. cit., p. 121.

The same point is made by T. R. Brown, writing about his experiences as a shop steward with Joint Production Committees in the engineering industry during the war:

“Disputes are seldom caused by breach of written agreements, but by the interpretations of what does and does not constitute a change of practice. In the first J.P.C. of which I had experience, workers’ representatives were composed of the senior shop stewards of the seven main unions in the factory. These were exactly the same people who met the management on strictly trade union business and it was surprising the number of times we had to resolve ourselves into a trade union meeting to ratify something we had agreed upon as a J.P.C. That committee operated very successfully for two years until an election was held on the agreed constitution. Only two of the shop stewards sought re-election, and were elected, but the committee soon became a farce since practically everything attempted had to be referred to the shop stewards for ratification; in the end the management consulted the shop stewards before placing anything before the J.P.C.”¹

To recognize the bargaining as well as the co-operative nature of joint consultation does not imply that it should be a two-sided affair confined to the representatives of the manual workers and of top management. Clearly the interests of all classes of workers have to be considered and should therefore be independently represented by delegates of their own choosing. This aspect of joint consultation was admirably explained to the House of Commons by Mr. George Isaacs when he was Minister of Labour:

“The House will doubtless have noticed that when most people talk about joint consultation in industry, the implication invariably is that joint consultation is something between top management and the rank and file operatives instead of being a recognized managerial technique permeating throughout the organization and embracing all levels of personnel; the directors taking their immediate subordinates into consultation and those subordinates acting similarly until the whole supervisory line, down to the foreman, is brought effectively into the picture.

¹*Joint Consultation*, a symposium published by the Industrial Welfare Society, 1948, p. 63.

In my opinion the test of a genuine belief in joint consultation is the degree of its universality in an organization, and not just the existence of a joint committee with the manual workers only. It cannot occasion surprise that junior members of managements and foremen—all who form part of the production team, technicians, draughtsmen, etc., should look cynically on a committee where higher management bring the rank and file into the picture to the careless exclusion of intermediate management and other classes. In our view a joint works committee should be a joint works committee and include representatives of everybody employed in the firm, and not merely certain sections of them.”¹

Trade unions, representing all classes of workers, might well regard the development of joint consultation as a further step in the vindication of their members' rights and not only as a way of increasing production. Presented in that light it might conceivably have a greater appeal to their active rank-and-file than it seems to have had. While strengthening the trade unions' influence on managerial practice, it does not weaken them in exercising their basic protective function in the way that direct representation on managerial bodies, through the acquisition of dual loyalties, is liable to do. Indeed, it enables them to extend their protective function far beyond what they have been able to achieve in the past by the negotiation of agreements, if only for the reason that the range of interests which can be protected is greatly extended.

Further emphasis has been given to this view of joint consultation by the development of automation. One of the conclusions reached in the report prepared by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research was that:

“... the transition to automation will be greatly eased if due attention is given to the needs, feelings and problems of the workers concerned, and if the trade unions are consulted in advance of each step.”²

¹*Hansard*, April 5th, 1950.

²D.S.I.R., *Automation*, 1956, p. 81.

CHAPTER VII

POLITICAL ACTION

Changing Political Objectives

The close association between the British trade unions and the Labour Party, which they helped to create, has meant that in the past half century they have relied largely upon that party for the realization of their political objectives. It was not always so. When the Webbs wrote their *Industrial Democracy* (first published in 1897) they contended that when the Trades Union Congress

"... diverges from its narrow trade union function, and expresses any opinion, either on general social reforms or party politics, it is bound to alienate whole sections of its constituents. The trade unions join the Congress for the promotion of a Parliamentary policy desired, not merely by a majority, but by all of them; and it is a violation of the implied contract between them to use the political force, towards the creation of which all are contributing, for the purposes of any particular political party. The trade unionists of Northumberland and Durham are predominantly Liberal. Those of Lancashire are largely Conservative. Those of Yorkshire and London, again, are deeply impregnated with Socialism."¹

The resolution passed at the Trades Union Congress in 1899 which led to the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee in the following year (it changed its name to that of Labour Party in 1906) was carried by no more than 546,000 votes to 434,000. Moreover:

"The Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, including as it did many who were hostile to the entire project, did not itself undertake the arrangements for the Conference, but left them to a committee on which the Socialist societies were

¹1920 edition, p. 271.

strongly represented. Consequently, these bodies, especially the Independent Labour Party, were able to shape the proceedings pretty much as they desired."¹

Yet between 1900 and 1912 the trade union affiliated membership of the Labour Party rose from 353,000 to 1,858,000, with the powerful Miners' Federation deciding to join the new party as late as 1910. The change in trade union attitude, from a luke-warm interest in independent Labour representation in Parliament to a firm commitment in support of one political party, was more than anything else the result of the Taff Vale and Osborne Judgments, a fact often expressed in the aphorism that the House of Lords made the Labour Party.

After the Taff Vale Judgment the unions faced the need for legislative action to protect their funds from attack. When in 1906 the Liberal Government was compelled under Labour Party pressure to withdraw its own unsatisfactory measure in favour of the Trades Disputes Act which met their demands in full, the trade unions found that they could better rely on a weak party in which their influence was strong, than a strong party in which their influence was weak. The reversal of the Osborne Judgment by the 1913 Trade Union Act² made it possible for the trade unions to spend money on political objects, if they met with their members' consent, and thus provided a legal basis for their relationship with the Labour Party.

¹G. D. H. Cole: *British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, p. 155.

²The main provision of the Act was that political objects may become part of the objects of a trade union only if:

- (a) a resolution approving the proposal is passed by the Annual Delegate Conference;
- (b) the resolution approving political objects is then endorsed by a ballot of all members;
- (c) a separate political levy is clearly introduced distinguishable from ordinary subscriptions;
- (d) any member who does not wish to contribute to the political levy may contract out;
- (e) all monies subscribed for political objects are paid into a separate Political Fund; and
- (f) all expenditure on political objects is paid out of the Political Fund and in no circumstances out of general funds.

The reorganization of the Labour Party in 1918 transformed it from a federation, able to act only through its affiliated societies, into a full-blooded political party with an individual as well as an affiliated membership, and with local organization of its own in every parliamentary constituency. It also accepted for the first time a socialist objective:

"To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service."

Nevertheless the effect of the new constitution was to strengthen the influence of the trade unions within the Party. The experiences of the war had made a deep impression on trade union opinion and the new generation of trade union leaders had no qualms about supporting so general and indefinite an expression of socialist aspiration.

Up to the General Strike, however, the main emphasis in the trade union world, at least on the part of those who looked beyond "pure and simple" trade unionism, was upon "workers' control" and its achievement by industrial action. What happened during the short period of office of the first minority Labour Government in 1924 did little to convince the trade unions that they should place their faith in Parliament for the achievement of their ends. Yet it was the lessons drawn from the wage conflicts of the post-war years which subsequently led the British trade unions to become more deeply involved in politics. If in the past they had, as the Webbs suggested, used the method of legal enactment to extend and safeguard their rights and for the same protective purposes as collective bargaining, after the "new approach" had been adopted in the Mond-Turner conversations, political action gradually became the means of extending their influence within the broader field of current economic policy. The limits to what could be achieved by a readiness to strike in adverse economic conditions, falling prices and mass unemployment, had been painfully demonstrated between 1920 and 1926. They now came to

recognize that even for the successful fulfilment of trade union functions it was necessary to concern themselves with what Walter Citrine, as General Secretary of the T.U.C., described as the "politics of industry".

In the lectures which he delivered at the T.U.C. Summer School in 1929 can be found a statement of what became the guiding conception in the next two decades. The development of the economic system, Citrine argued, was towards concentration of ownership and central direction of industry. This emphasis on the regulative as opposed to the competitive principle should, he said, be welcomed by trade unions. Without it the control of industry which they had advocated would be impossible; with it their claim to participate in such control would be irresistible. The unions should boldly declare that the efficiency and prosperity of industry were their immediate concern and for this reason demand a greater say in deciding how it was to be conducted.

This general approach could be interpreted in two ways, very different in their social significance. The regulative principle could be applied by *capitalist monopolies* conceding a kind of junior partnership to the trade unions in their industries but excluding public influence—a policy euphemistically described as "industrial self-government" in the manifesto of 120 leading industrialists issued during the Second World War—or by the *Government* through measures of nationalization, public planning and control with the co-operation of both sides of industry. Within the trade union world there were forces pushing in both directions. How far it was the unions' association with the Labour Party which prevented them from following the former course may one day be revealed when the necessary research has been undertaken. The T.U.C.'s 1944 *Report on Post-War Reconstruction* certainly showed a decided preference for *Public Control*, as the following extract serves to illustrate:

"The modern economic system bears little resemblance to the *laissez-faire* form of capitalism of a century ago. Before the present war it was a system subject to a considerable amount of control exercised in many cases by private individuals and

organizations and not infrequently in a manner in which public responsibility was not clearly defined or accepted. Technical development and the greater complexity of economic relationships have made higher forms of business organization advantageous and, indeed, inevitable, but the concentration of economic power in private hands, which so far has been a consequence of this development, brings with it dangers of which the whole community is now acutely aware. Although the supporters of private enterprise still frequently plead their cases in the name of freedom, it is now abundantly clear that the liberty of the individual is most endangered by a system of unrestrained private enterprise.

Equally fallacious is the claim that only free private enterprise can provide a rising level of industrial efficiency. On the contrary the development of scientific research and productive technique and, even more, their full utilization to meet the needs of the people, have been continually hampered on the one hand by lack of industrial co-ordination and organization, and, on the other hand, by the restrictive policies of private monopolies. One of the strongest arguments for the transfer to public ownership of key industries and for the introduction of those other forms of public control which we propose is that these changes are essential for efficient industrial organization and to ensure that industrial efficiency serves its proper purpose of improving the standard of life of the community. A controlled economic system is a modern necessity in advanced industrial communities. The choice before us is not between control or no control, but, in principle, between control by public authority responsible to the community, or control by private groups and persons owning a final responsibility to themselves alone and, in detail, between degrees of control and types of control."

Links with the Labour Party

It would be a mistake to assume that because today many trade unions stand solidly behind the Labour Party they have forfeited their independence or weakened their function as trade unions. The ties between the unions and the Party are exceedingly complex, which may explain the conflicting views advanced in regard to this relationship. Sometimes it is alleged that the trade unions control the Labour Party and at other times that the Labour Party controls the trade unions. In fact neither proposition is true.

Naturally the trade unions have an influence on Labour Party policy, but theirs is one influence among several and it is not uniform in character. On the whole it is probably more negative than positive: it would be difficult for the Labour Party (or a Labour Government) to disregard any strong and widely held trade union opinion, but policy, except in those matters with which the unions are intimately concerned, is rarely initiated by the trade union wing of the Party. The trade unions for their part are usually careful not to act in a way which would injure the Labour Party's prospects, but there is no merging of identities. The Trades Union Congress, which represents them collectively, is very much a separate entity, following political objectives derived from basic trade union purposes. Thus it is not uncommon for the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party to take a different view upon a subject, although they then endeavour to reach agreement, or at least to avoid any violent conflict in public. All this becomes clearer when we look more closely at the nature of the ties between them.

Not all trade unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress are also affiliated to the Labour Party. With the exception of the Civil Service unions other than the Union of Post Office Workers, however, most of the hundred or so T.U.C. unions not affiliated to the Labour Party are small, the largest being the National Union of Hosiery Workers with 40,000 members. The total membership of the Labour Party in 1955 was 6,483,994, its individual membership amounting to 843,356. In the same year the trade unions paid in affiliation fees £140,935 out of a total of £162,408, and £99,814 to the General Election Fund out of a total of £104,879. The Labour Party at headquarters is thus greatly dependent upon the trade unions for its income.

In the past thirty years the trade union membership of the Labour Party has been particularly affected both by changes in the total number of trade unionists and by the 1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act and its repeal in 1946. Under the 1913 Act trade unionists who had other party allegiances, or who for other reasons did not wish to contribute to the political funds of their unions were able to "contract out" of

paying the political levy. The 1927 Act reversed this procedure; members of unions who wished to pay the political levy had to "contract in" by signing a written undertaking to this effect. With the repeal of this Act there was, of course, a return to the previous practice. The combined effect of the two factors can be observed in the following table:

			Trade Union Membership of Labour Party (in millions)	Total Membership of Trade Unions (in millions)
1920	..	..	4.3	8.3
1927	..	..	3.2	4.9
1928	..	..	2.0	4.8
1934	..	..	1.9	4.6
1946	..	..	2.6	8.8
1947	..	..	4.4	9.1
1955	..	..	5.6	9.7

The table makes it necessary to draw attention to a significant development in the period of "contracting in": when after 1933 trade union membership began steadily to increase, the proportion of members paying political levy declined considerably. In the case of registered trade unions with political funds this proportion fell from 57.7 per cent in 1934 to 41.8 per cent in 1943 after which year it began to increase again, jumping up to nearly 91 per cent in 1947 after the repeal of the 1927 Act. The failure of the Labour Party support to keep pace with rising trade union membership was particularly marked in the general workers' unions. In 1937, 71 per cent of the T.U.C. affiliated membership of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers was affiliated to the Labour Party, but by 1946 the proportion had fallen to 30 per cent; the corresponding figures for the Transport and General Workers' Union were 57 and 37 per cent.

The practice of "contracting in" revealed more clearly the varying degrees of political interest in the different unions, since the proportion of members paying political levy then varied

greatly. In 1946, the last year which can be taken, it was as high as 85 per cent in the Railway Clerks' Association (now the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association) and 77 per cent in the National Union of Mineworkers, but as low as 17 per cent in the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers and 15 per cent in the Electrical Trades Union.

The amount of political levy also varies from union to union between the extremes of 1s. and 8s. 8d. a year. The National Union of Agricultural Workers collects 1s., the National Union of Railwaymen 2s. 2d., and the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association 4s. 4d. a year. Only 9d. of this is paid into the Labour Party headquarters' funds. Of the remainder a part is retained by union headquarters, which is used *inter alia* to give financial support to the union's Members of Parliament and to the candidates whom it is sponsoring in elections. A part is returned to area committees or branches for such purposes as the payment of affiliation fees to local Labour Parties.

The greater part of the trade union group of Labour candidates is sponsored by the miners, the railway workers and the two general workers' unions. In all the post-war General Elections they accounted together for more than two-thirds of the total. The particular interest of these unions in the method of legal enactment and in nationalization is probably the main explanation for their weighty representation.

The practice of sponsoring candidates for Parliament has been a part of trade union practice since 1874. With the creation of the Labour Party they gradually came under its banner, although the National Union of Teachers, which is not affiliated to the T.U.C., follows the practice of sponsoring candidates in all political parties. On the whole the trade union sponsored candidates tend to get the safer seats because the unions are disinclined to spend their members' money on supporting a candidate whose chances are slight. Consequently the smaller the number of Labour M.P.s returned, the larger is likely to be the proportion of trade union members, as the following table shows.

*Trade Union Sponsorship of Labour Candidates
in General Elections, 1929-1955*

	No. of Labour Candidates	Number returned	Per- centage returned	Candidates returned as percentage of total returned
<i>1955 Election</i>				
Trade Union	128	96	75	35
Others	489	181	37	65
<i>1951 Election</i>				
Trade Union	139	105	75	36
Others	474	190	40	64
<i>1950 Election</i>				
Trade Union	140	110	78	35
Others	472	205	43	65
<i>1945 Election</i>				
Trade Union	125	120	96	30
Others	478	273	57	70
<i>1935 Election</i>				
Trade Union	128	79	62	51
Others	424	75	18	49
<i>1931 Election</i>				
Trade Union	129	32	25	70
Others	362	14	4	30
<i>1929 Election</i>				
Trade Union	139	115	83	40
Others	430	172	40	60

Compiled from Annual Conference Reports of Labour Party.

At the Annual Conference of the Labour Party the trade unions on the basis of their affiliated membership command an overwhelming majority of the votes. Formally it might seem that policy were entirely in their hands. During the 'thirties representatives of constituency parties protested strongly against the domination of the Party by the trade unions as a result of their "block vote".¹ This led to some changes in the Labour Party constitution in 1937; the constituency party representation on the National Executive was increased from five to seven and they were given the right to elect their representatives separately. Since then there has been no strong drive for constitutional reform. In practice policy-making is left very much in the hands of the National Executive and the political leaders of the Party, and on controversial issues the trade unions rarely vote the same way. A study of Conference reports shows that differences of opinion and voting on resolutions cut right across the division between the trade union and local party delegates.

On the National Executive the trade union representation is weaker; they elect twelve out of a total of twenty-seven members, although this also includes five women representatives who are elected by the Conference as a whole. Furthermore, the political leaders of the Party usually have a greater influence on the decisions than the trade union representatives, because of their greater standing in the movement and more intimate knowledge of many of the matters under discussion.

Few of the leading officials of trade unions attempt to enter Parliament. Many unions have a rule which prevents them from doing so. In 1956 only two members of the T.U.C. General Council were M.P.s, and even among the twelve trade union members of the Labour Party Executive only one sat in Parliament.

Although the trade unions turn to both bodies for political action, the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party lead a surprisingly independent existence. In the 'twenties they shared a research department, but today there is only provision for liaison between a few of their committees. The Policy and

¹In a card vote the trade unions' voting strength is based on their affiliated membership; that of the constituency parties only on their individual membership.

Publicity Sub-Committee of the Labour Party Executive, for example, includes two representatives of the T.U.C. General Council, and the Economic Committee of the T.U.C. two representatives from the Labour Party. Otherwise the only organizational ties are those provided by the rather inactive National Council of Labour.

This is the most important formal link between the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress and the Co-operative Union, and is composed of eight representatives of each, including the three joint chairmen and secretaries. One of its stated purposes is "to endeavour to secure a common policy and joint action, whether by legislation or otherwise, in all questions affecting the workers as producers, consumers and citizens." It does from time to time issue common declarations of policy but largely it serves to settle differences of opinion arising between the three main sections of the labour movement and to keep them informed on one another's activities.

Opposition to Communist Penetration

Tolerance is recognized to be one of the most firmly entrenched of British traditions. The idea that anyone should be discriminated against for holding certain political opinions is generally regarded with abhorrence. This is particularly true within the labour movement, where the term "heresy-hunting" immediately arouses strong emotions of opposition and resentment. Tolerance, however, has its limits and cannot reasonably be carried to the point of self-destruction. An unscrupulous minority must be prevented from exploiting the tolerance of the majority in order to gain the power which will enable it to give its own intolerance full reign. Towards the end of 1948 the T.U.C. General Council decided that the time had come to take more vigorous action than before against the disruptive activities of the communists within the trade unions. Commenting on the statement *Defend Democracy—Communist Activities Examined*, which the General Council issued after their meeting in November of that year, Sir Vincent Tewson, the General Secretary, said: "We have been patient, perhaps too patient. But we shall fight this issue through to a finish."

This was not the first time that Congress had to tackle

the problem. In the late 'twenties, when the Communist Party acting on the instructions of the Red International of Labour Unions was attempting to establish breakaway organizations, the trade unions were warned to be on their guard against disruption. The failure of this tactic led the communists to renew their efforts at infiltration, which were concentrated mainly on the local trades councils. The development became sufficiently serious for the T.U.C. to issue in 1935 a circular threatening to withdraw recognition from trades councils which accepted delegates "in any way connected with either communist or fascist organizations or any of their ancillary bodies". Frustrated by this decision, the communists then concentrated their efforts on conducting a campaign to secure affiliation to the Labour Party, a tactic which also failed.

It was in 1939 that the Communist Party of Great Britain, having learnt something from past failures, set out to capture positions of influence within individual trade unions in a more gradual and systematic fashion than before. Although the policy of the Party continued to twist and turn in order to conform with the requirements of Soviet Russia, the new tactic met with greater success. As the T.U.C. pointed out in its statement on *The Tactics of Disruption*, the communists sought influence within the trade union movement from 1939 to 1941 for the purpose of "stopping the war" and from 1941 to 1945 for the purpose of "winning the war"; from 1945 to 1947 they were concerned with securing acceptance for the policy of increased production and from 1947 to the present time with magnifying industrial grievances in order to impede production by stoppages of work. Throughout all these changes, the communists have always presented their current party "line" not as communists but as trade unionists anxious to protect the interests of the workers, an attitude which many militant trade unionists in their ranks or influenced by their propaganda have no doubt sincerely held.

The conditions brought about by the Second World War favoured their efforts. Branch meetings were poorly attended by workers exhausted by long hours of work and the strain of air raids. Many of the younger, able candidates for union office were away in the Forces. A small, but well-organized

faction working within a union was often able to capture enough votes to place its own men in key positions. Thus the picture at the end of 1947 was roughly as follows. Taking the seventeen largest trade unions in Great Britain, with a membership of more than 100,000, it was reckoned that the communists and their supporters had won sufficient representation on the executive bodies to control or nearly control four of them, to have an appreciable but not formidable influence on six, while in the remaining seven they did not count at all.¹

Since then there has been a steady and considerable decline in their influence within the trade unions. The decision of the T.U.C. in 1948 to take action against the communists was not the result of any recent increase in their strength, but was brought about mainly by the formation of the Cominform and its efforts to hamper economic recovery in Western Europe. Having no executive authority over its affiliated organizations the T.U.C. could do little more than keep them informed on communist activities and ask them to consider whether they could continue to trust communists to occupy important positions of responsibility.

This kind of leadership the T.U.C. has given and, on the whole, it has met with a favourable response. But only a few unions have decided to exclude communists from holding office. The National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants and the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers had all adopted rules or decisions to this effect in the late 'twenties, but the last-named reversed its decision in 1942. The British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association had carried a similar resolution by a majority of its quarterly conference of officials in 1935. After the T.U.C.'s more recent campaign the only large union which decided to change its rules and exclude communists from office was the Transport and General Workers' Union, nine of whose full-time officers were dismissed in 1950 because they refused to sign a form that they were not members of the Communist Party.

The communists are not alone in acting as an organized

¹See *The Times*, February 9th, 1948.

influence within the trade union movement. Conservatives, Liberals and Roman Catholics all have some kind of organization to advocate their own industrial policy within its ranks. There has never been any suggestion that such activities should be suppressed even within unions that are affiliated to the Labour Party. Admittedly these bodies do not appear to have much effect on union policy, although the Associations of Catholic Trade Unionists which have grown up in every diocese since 1945, have played an active part in trying to eradicate communist influence, and might be used for other purposes.

There are obvious dangers in political discrimination but the communists have been singled out for special attention because of the harm they were doing to the trade union movement. By their incitement and support of unofficial strikes they endanger the machinery of negotiation and impede economic progress; by their encouragement of any and every wage demand they obstruct the approach to a more responsible wages policy; and by the use of unscrupulous methods and the exploitation of branch meetings as a field for political agitation they weaken trade union democracy. Their lack of political success in Great Britain has caused them to concentrate their efforts on industrial agitation. Here there are always legitimate grievances to exploit and not a few communists have good trade union records which they maintain by sacrificing, on occasions, the party line to their union loyalty.

CHAPTER VIII

RELATIONS WITH THE STATE

IN all highly industrialized countries the kind of relationship which should exist between trade unions and the State presents one of the leading social problems of our time. In Great Britain it has been solved up to a point in our traditional, empirical fashion. The relationship, as we have seen, has passed through three successive phases: hostility, toleration and finally, partnership. Today the British trade unions are on the whole "with but not of" the State. In other words the partnership has two equally important and only apparently contradictory features: independence and interdependence.

This is true in all the three main fields of union activity, in industrial relations, in economic government and in party politics. In the exercise of their primary function, the improvement of the wages and working conditions of their members, the trade unions have never rejected the assistance of the State, which they have received to an increasing extent, but they have always regarded it as subsidiary to their own efforts. In the design and application of the nation's economic policy, the self-assigned role of the trade unions is a consultative one. They have no veto rights. Formally they can only advise, but their very independence gives them the strength to challenge the Government effectively when the need arises. Finally, despite their close association with the Labour Party, they neither control it, nor does it control them. Thus even in this relationship there is both independence and interdependence.

That such a partnership is essential to the survival and development of democracy in the modern world is evident if the possible alternatives are considered. The State and the trade unions might co-exist as independent powers in a condition of open or concealed warfare. This was roughly the position in Great Britain between 1920 and 1926, although it could be said that the foundations of the present partnership had already

been laid. Neither the workers nor the community as a whole gained anything from this. Today it would be an unmitigated disaster, and would lead perforce to one of the other two possibilities: either the State conquers the trade unions, or the trade unions conquer the State. The first course ends in some kind of totalitarian system. Whether the unions are destroyed, as under fascism, or turned into instruments by which the State controls the workers, as under communism, matters little in terms of democratic freedom and human dignity. The second course, the dream of the revolutionary syndicalists, commands few supporters today, if only because it is known to be a dream that can never become a reality. The State has social functions other than those which trade unions can perform and cannot be dispensed with.

All democratic States have recognized independent trade unionism as an essential social institution, and are accordingly working towards some form of partnership. What is striking about the relationship in Great Britain is how little it has been regulated by legislation. With the repeal of the 1927 Act, which seriously limited the freedom of the trade unions, the control exercised by the State over the domestic affairs and industrial and political activities of the trade unions is relatively slight and is no more than the trade unions themselves desire for the sake of the security of their organization and the protection of their members. In short, the partnership depends less upon institutional arrangements than upon the way in which they are worked.

The change in the relationship between the trade unions and the State in Great Britain has come about more by a process of learning from experience than by conscious design. The trade union movement, because it answered a profound need on the part of the industrial workers, possessed an inherent vitality which defied suppression. As it gained in power it compelled both the employers and the State to recognize its existence and to come to terms with it. This development was accelerated by two world wars in which the bargaining strength of the workers was greatly enhanced. The trade unions know and are not likely to forget that their rights and their achievements have largely been won by their own strength.

They will not be willing to surrender their independence, to merge their organization into the machinery of government or to accept any outside control over the exercise of what they regard as their essential functions.

At the same time the character of the State has changed, partly as a result of their own political action. A century ago political power was exercised almost exclusively by the moneyed and landowning classes. Industrial workers, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, had "nothing to lose but their chains". The extension of the franchise, the growth of public education, the rise of the Labour Party, the abandonment of *laissez-faire* in favour of a more controlled economy and, finally, the conceding to the trade unions of a position of influence in the conduct of the nation's affairs, have altered the picture considerably. In the modern democratic State the workers do not have to be persuaded by dubious, jingoistic arguments that they have something to defend. They know it, and the communists have had very little success in trying to convince them of the contrary. Accordingly, their organizations, the trade unions, have no hesitation about co-operating with governments in war or peace to uphold what is now looked upon as a common heritage. Part of that heritage is, of course, their right to criticize and oppose the government where they disagree with what it is doing.

Less than a quarter of a century ago, W. Milne-Bailey wrote: "Industrial conflict has become a menace to the State, but no effective steps have been taken to resolve the clash by finding an agreed basis on which trade unionism can fit into the economic life and institutions of the community without sacrificing its independence and freedom". "This," he suggested, "is the great task which has now to be faced".¹ Has it, then, been faced and fulfilled? Does the undoubted improvement in relations since his time represent an enduring union based on mutual respect and regard? Or is it no more than a temporary marriage of convenience that could be wrecked at any time?

The change from a Labour to a Conservative Government in October 1951 tested the strength of the ties. The immediate response of the T.U.C. was significant. The General Council

¹W. Milne-Bailey: *Trade Unions and the State*, 1934, p. 383.

issued a statement emphasizing that its attitude towards the new Government was not in doubt.

"It is our long-standing practice to seek to work amicably with whatever Government is in power and through consultation jointly with Ministers and the other side of industry to find practical solutions to the social and economic problems facing this country. . . . We expect of this Government that they will maintain to the full this practice of consultation. On our part we shall continue to examine every question solely in the light of its industrial and economic implications."¹

Conservative Governments have maintained intact the whole of the machinery for consultation and, what is more, have continued to ascertain the views of the T.U.C. before taking action on subjects where they had been previously consulted. Moreover, no attempt has been made to restore any of the restrictive provisions of the 1927 Act, and the demands which have been raised from time to time by Conservative back-benchers for legislative intervention in union affairs have been firmly rejected. The T.U.C. on its side has just as strongly resisted the occasional demands within the trade union movement for the use of industrial action to oppose unpopular policies of the Government.

To this extent there has been continuity in the relations between the trade unions and the State, despite the change in governments. It is extremely difficult, however, to analyse the terms of the implicit understanding on which this continuous relationship rests. One is reminded of Professor T. H. Marshall's remark that "a little common sense can often move a mountain of paradox in the world of action, though logic may be unable to surmount it in the world of thought".² Clearly the unions undertake, for their part, not to resort to industrial action to achieve their political ends, while governments agree not to act politically on matters which the two sides of industry prefer to work out for themselves. But in an age when industry and politics are more interwoven than ever before, how can any clear lines of demarcation be drawn between industrial and political action? The understanding is, in fact, both broader and

¹Trades Union Congress: *84th Annual Report*, 1952, p. 300.

²T. H. Marshall: *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1950, p. 74.

more complex. The unions, for example, have to recognize that a large-scale strike, even when called for an industrial objective, like a wage increase, is likely to have political consequences and may bring them as much into conflict with the government as with the employers. The government, too, does not abstain from intervening in industrial relations; Order 1376 represents a far greater degree of intervention than would have seemed possible before the war. Intervention has not been avoided but rather confined within limits set by the general consent of unions and employers.

What is implied in the present relationship between the trade unions and the State is something like a treaty of non-intervention. Not that governments do not try to influence the unions or the unions to bring pressure to bear on governments. That is happening continually and, indeed, is the point of their consultative arrangements. It is rather that they abstain from *coercing* each other, like two sovereign states which have agreed to refrain from invading the other's territory. The analogy cannot be pressed too far because the unions are not in all things a law unto themselves; they enjoy a sphere of autonomy within the state not, strictly, a position of sovereignty. But non-coercive-intervention is the essence of their relationship. It is upheld by a mutual recognition of the great dangers involved in a power conflict, but also by a generally accepted view of what are the proper functions of the two institutions. Society has, as it were, given its approval to the principle of separating, as far as possible, industrial from political government.

A good illustration of this theme is provided by the treatment of the post-war "closed shop" controversy by successive Labour and Conservative Governments. Although started by the 1946 agreement between the London Passenger Transport Board and the Transport and General Workers' Union,¹ the controversy reached its peak as the result of a decision by the Durham County Council in 1950 that each of its employees—professional as well as manual workers—should produce evidence of union membership or face dismissal. The associations of the professional employees, including teachers, doctors and nurses, strongly objected to the decision. Without

¹See p. 47.

tracing the ensuing conflict through all its phases,¹ the attitude adopted by the Labour Government can be summed up as follows. It deprecated unilateral action by an employer in a matter which should be settled by agreement with the unions; it was prepared to use its influence to get the Council to drop their requirement, as it did even to the point of employing statutory powers; but it was not prepared to introduce legislation (on the lines of the 1927 Act) to prohibit local and other public authorities from making union membership a condition of employment. Such legislation had been demanded by Conservatives and Liberals. When the government changed in 1951, the Conservatives were faced with a continuation of the same controversy. They proceeded to deal with it "on the same lines as were adopted by the late Government"²—to quote the words of the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. There was nothing to prevent them from re-enacting the appropriate clause of the 1927 Act, nothing, that is, apart from their realization of the consequences which would flow from a departure from the principle of non-coercive-intervention.

To recognize that a fundamental continuity exists in the relations between the trade unions and the State is not to suggest that they remain unaffected by politics. No one would deny that the T.U.C.'s relations with the post-war Labour Governments were on the whole more intimate and more cordial than they have been with subsequent Conservative Governments. This difference cannot be explained simply on grounds of traditional sympathies and antipathies, although they no doubt have played their part. Trade unions are not inclined to be either sentimental or doctrinaire when they are dealing with practical questions which affect their members' interests. The growth of union opposition to the Conservative Governments was gradual and aroused in the main by immediate economic issues. In a leader written on the eve of the 1956 Trades Union Congress, *The Times* described the trend and the reasons for it.

¹The full story is told by Jean T. McKelvey: "The 'Closed Shop' Controversy in Postwar Britain" (*Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, July 1954).

²*Hansard*, May 22nd, 1952.

"In the days of the Labour Government, union leaders supported wage restraint, at the cost of difficulties with their own members, because they were satisfied that the Government were trying to establish what they called 'fair shares', which meant in effect a redistribution of income in the workers' favour. When the Conservatives were returned to office the union leaders expressed their willingness to work amicably with them. For a time, while the economic climate was fair, the former co-operation largely continued. When economic difficulties returned, the unions became increasingly restless at the Government's policy. Even the more co-operative union leaders were angered by the second of last year's budgets, because they believed that an unfair burden was being placed upon wage earners. The anger has grown and now, even though prices are relatively stable, the answer of the Congress to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's appeal for wage restraint is likely to be an unqualified and virtually unanimous 'No'."

Congress confirmed this prophecy, even more emphatically than had been expected by the ovation it gave to the speech of the new General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Mr. Frank Cousins. Its rejection of the Conservative Government's policy of a "price plateau" was but one in a series of events which led up to the shipbuilding and engineering strikes of the following year. The general problem of wage policy under full employment has already been dealt with in a previous chapter. What has to be noted here is its crucial significance in affecting the relations between the trade unions and the government. The Labour Government managed, by employing shock tactics, to secure the temporary co-operation of the unions for wage restraint, but the experiment had broken down before it was out of office. The Conservative Government failed at any time to gain union consent for its efforts to curb the wage movement, mainly on account of their dislike of other aspects of its economic policy. When, however, it tried to do something without their consent it only succeeded in precipitating, in 1957, the worst industrial conflict since 1926.

What is to happen to wages under full employment must be regarded as the greatest unresolved problem in the existing relations between the trade unions and the State. Theoretically as well as practically; for there is nothing like an accepted view

¹*The Times*, September 3rd, 1956.

of the lines on which it can and should be solved. Some argue that there is no problem in the field of wage determination, that inflation could be prevented by more stringent financial and fiscal policies on the part of the government. At the other extreme, the problem, while recognized, is held to be insoluble on the grounds that nothing short of the total planning of all personal incomes—which a democracy will never accept—would avoid the present competitive scramble for increasing money incomes. Post-war governments, Labour and Conservative, faced with the responsibility for arresting the decline in the value of money, have been unwilling to accept either of these views. They have wanted to slow down the upward movement of wages in order to strengthen the effect of their other anti-inflationary measures, but whenever they tried to go beyond mere appeals for restraint they ran into difficulties.

The problem can be stated simply enough. Trade unions claim that their freedom to negotiate wage rates with employers must not be restricted. This means that the parties can conclude agreements without regard to any broader interests than their own. The outcome, under full employment, has become an annual round of wage increases unrelated to increases in national output; these lead to further price increases which, in turn, are the cause of further wage increases. The whole of the community, not least its wage-earning section, has an interest in stable prices. Only the government can represent and protect that interest, but can it act without tampering with collective bargaining and restricting the freedom of trade unions? The previous argument of this chapter suggests that it cannot coerce the unions into accepting any form of public control over wages. To do so would be to destroy the foundations of their existing relationship with the State and to invite the power conflict which it is designed to avoid. There remains the open question whether, and under what conditions, the trade unions would be prepared voluntarily to reach an understanding with the government on a national wages policy.

APPENDIX

TRADE UNION FINANCES

THE greater part of the income of the British trade unions—about nine-tenths—is derived from the members' weekly contributions. Entrance fees, where they exist, are small. Special levies have been imposed from time to time, and most union rules provide for this possibility, but their use has been confined to periods of financial stress as at the time of national strikes. Invested funds have become an increasingly important source of income. Some unions pay out the State unemployment insurance benefit to their members and recover, in addition to the money they have disbursed, a payment for administration expenses.

Rates of contribution vary from union to union according to the types and scales of benefit made available to members. Except in a few craft or professional workers' unions, which have considerably higher rates, subscriptions range generally from eightpence to two shillings a week. Many unions have different scales of contributions for different sections of their membership; it may be optional for the member to choose to which section he will belong, or it may depend on trade qualifications.

It is mainly the differences in the various welfare or friendly benefits provided (unemployment, sickness, accident, funeral, superannuation, etc.) which account for the different rates of contribution. The provision of these benefits was a characteristic feature of the nineteenth-century craft unions, although some non-manual workers' unions, formed at a later date, have followed their example. "New Unionism" on the other hand was characterised by its repudiation, by and large, of the provident function—the method of "mutual insurance", to employ the terminology of the Webbs—on the grounds that it weakened union militancy and that the lower-paid workers could not afford high rates of contribution. The rise of the State

system of social insurance has reduced the significance of these benefits, but, as might be expected, where they have become an established part of union activity, they continue to be provided as before.

Averages are apt to be misleading, but the table¹ which appears on the opposite page reveals some of the more important trends in union finances over the period covered. It also illustrates the deep-rooted conservatism of the unions in the conduct of their financial affairs. What is particularly striking is how little the average income per member has increased after the substantial changes in union organization at the end of the First World War; not until 1953 was the figure for 1921 passed. The average is affected by shifts in the proportion of the total membership in unions with low or high rates of contribution. The more rapid expansion of the general workers' unions as compared with craft unions during the past two decades has, for example, reduced the average contribution. Even so, the rise after the Second World War is slight, certainly when contrasted with the rise in workers' earnings.

When we turn to expenditure it will be noted that the relatively peaceful state of industrial relations from 1927 to 1955 has meant that the unions had little to pay out in dispute benefit. Up to 1939 the annual average was about one shilling per member; from 1940 to 1951, when Order 1305 was in force, it was less than twopence; since then it has increased to more than one shilling again. Full employment from 1941 onwards has reduced expenditure on unemployment benefit to a small amount. Political expenditure has rarely exceeded a shilling per member at any time and, apart from the General Election years, has usually run at half that sum or less. The bulk of union spending during and since the Second World War has been on friendly benefits and on their own working expenses. The first item has

¹The table is compiled from the Statistical Summaries relating to the membership and finances of registered trade unions in Great Britain issued by the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies. (In 1955 the number of registered trade unions was 405 with about 8½ million members or more than 88 per cent of the total trade union membership.) Income from other sources than members' contributions is not included. Unemployment benefit includes payment for travelling and emigration, but not State unemployment insurance benefit. Working expenses include all other outgoings, e.g. affiliation fees to federations and other bodies.

*Income, Expenditure and Funds per Member of
Registered Trade Unions 1910-1955 (in shillings)*

YEAR	INCOME (from members)	EXPENDITURE					FUNDS FIELD
		Dispute Benefit	Unem- ployment Benefit	Other Welfare Benefits	Political	Working Expenses	
1910	27.8	5.3	6.8	11.1	—	8.1	59.3
1911	27.8	5.2	4.8	9.8	—	8.4	54.2
1912	27.1	13.0	5.0	9.2	—	8.4	43.8
1913	25.5	2.8	2.5	8.6	0.1	8.3	40.3
1914	26.9	4.1	4.5	8.6	0.1	8.6	43.6
1915	25.4	0.5	1.0	7.7	0.2	8.5	50.4
1916	24.7	0.5	0.5	7.0	0.2	8.2	57.4
1917	23.5	0.6	1.0	6.2	0.2	8.5	58.3
1918	23.4	1.1	0.7	6.1	0.5	9.5	56.8
1919	24.7	6.6	2.9	5.1	0.3	11.3	49.1
1920	32.4	9.3	4.5	5.1	0.5	17.2	45.8
1921	41.4	12.5	26.8	7.9	0.6	17.1	39.7
1922	39.2	6.3	12.9	9.0	1.2	18.8	43.8
1923	36.5	3.3	5.0	9.1	1.0	16.6	49.3
1924	36.9	5.3	4.8	9.5	1.0	17.5	51.3
1925	35.9	1.4	6.3	9.6	0.5	16.0	56.5
1926	33.8	27.1	9.8	10.9	0.5	17.2	40.9
1927	37.7	0.9	5.3	11.4	0.7	16.1	49.7
1928	37.5	0.7	6.4	11.9	0.6	16.5	56.2
1929	37.5	2.1	5.4	12.5	0.9	16.7	60.2
1930	37.6	1.6	9.7	12.1	0.5	16.6	62.0
1931	38.0	0.9	11.6	13.1	0.9	17.7	63.2
1932	38.4	1.5	10.0	13.6	0.5	17.7	65.7
1933	38.2	1.1	6.5	13.9	0.6	17.3	70.2
1934	38.2	0.6	4.8	12.8	0.6	16.7	73.6
1935	37.0	1.2	3.7	12.2	0.9	15.5	74.7
1936	36.2	0.9	2.8	11.5	0.5	16.6	76.2
1937	35.7	1.4	2.2	10.6	0.5	15.0	77.2
1938	36.0	0.6	3.6	10.5	0.5	15.8	82.3
1939	35.4	0.7	3.0	10.6	0.5	15.4	88.5
1940	36.0	0.2	3.0	10.4	0.4	14.8	92.2
1941	31.6	0.1	0.7	9.3	0.4	14.5	96.3
1942	31.6	0.1	0.2	8.5	0.3	14.3	96.0
1943	32.2	0.1	0.2	8.8	0.3	15.0	100.3
1944	33.4	0.1	0.2	9.1	0.4	16.1	115.0
1945	34.4	0.1	0.3	13.0	1.1	17.6	130.0
1946	34.8	0.2	0.7	9.5	0.5	17.6	123.0
1947	37.8	0.1	1.1	9.7	0.8	21.1	128.0
1948	38.9	0.6	0.5	9.5	1.0	21.1	137.4
1949	40.3	0.2	0.4	10.9	1.3	23.0	147.4
1950	39.6	0.6	0.4	10.4	1.1	22.8	156.4
1951	39.2	0.5	0.3	10.8	1.3	25.3	156.5
1952	41.1	0.8	0.9	11.3	0.9	26.6	161.4
1953	43.1	0.6	0.4	12.1	0.9	27.5	169.8
1954	43.9	1.2	0.3	12.2	0.9	27.9	176.8
1955	45.5	1.5	0.3	12.4	1.4	29.9	179.8

been fairly stable, while the second, understandably, has been rising since 1942.

Mainly as a result of the decline in their combined expenditure on dispute and unemployment benefit, the reserve funds held by the unions have been rising; in total from less than £12 millions in 1933 to about £76½ millions in 1955. Union membership, however, has more than doubled, so that the increase in funds per member is less spectacular, though appreciable; from £3½ in 1933 to £9 in 1955. Such a comparison takes no account of the change in the value of money, and the £ has now less than one-third of its pre-war value. Measured, then, in real terms average funds per member have not increased at all.

The financial strength of trade unions cannot be assessed simply by looking at the state of their reserve funds. Part of the funds are tied up in land and buildings, or in investments that cannot easily be turned into cash should a strike or a lock-out lead to a sudden drain on their resources. On the other hand in such an emergency the extent to which a union can impose a special levy on its members is likely to be at least as important as the actual amount of cash at its disposal. From this point of view full employment has probably placed the unions in a stronger position than they previously enjoyed.

The fact that funds have been rising has frequently been used as an argument against increasing union rates of contribution. But many unions are seriously handicapped by having to work within a budget which, because of rising costs, makes it difficult for them even to maintain their existing services. Moreover, if there are to be further improvements in their work, these are likely to depend on an increase in the number of full-time officials and greater expenditure on such activities as education, publicity and research. The American trade union movement, by contrast, employs three times as many paid employees per member.¹

The T.U.C. General Council, alarmed by some of the dangers in the existing situation, has recently undertaken a survey of the finances of their affiliated unions. The final memorandum, published in March 1956, makes a post- and

¹B. C. Roberts, *Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain*, 1956, p. 465.

pre-war comparison for the years 1954 and 1939, based on information supplied by 123 unions representing 85 per cent of the T.U.C.'s total affiliated membership. The main conclusions revealed by the survey have been summarized by the General Secretary as follows¹:

1. Union spending on administration in 1954 was three times as high as in 1939. As membership increased by half between those two years, costs of administration per member have risen by about 80 per cent.
2. In the same period, contributions have risen by about one-quarter on average, while workers' earnings are on average about three times as high as in 1939.
3. Nearly fifty unions spent more in 1954 than they received in contributions in that year.
4. In actual cash, without allowing for the fall in the value of money, unions in 1954 were able to set aside for the future from contributions less than one-sixth of the amount they were putting to reserve in 1939.

This would seem to substantiate Sir Vincent Tewson's opening comment—"Trade unions, like the people they represent, have been unable to contract out of the effect of the rising prices of materials and services in the wartime and post-war years. The higher cost of living brings worries to the unions as well as to the members they serve."

¹ *Finances of Trade Unions*, issued by the Trades Union Congress, 1956, p. 2.

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